"An expertly-crafted mystery that evokes the masters of the genre while still pushing things forward. Fill up your mug and take a seat. You're in for a hell of a story."

—Alex Segura, author of *Silent City* and *Down the Darkest Street*

STUMPTOWN™

GREG RUCKA • JUSTIN GREENWOOD • RYAN HILL

VOLUME 4

THE CASE OF THE CUP OF JOE

STUMPTOWN™

INVESTIGATIONS • PORTLAND, OREGON

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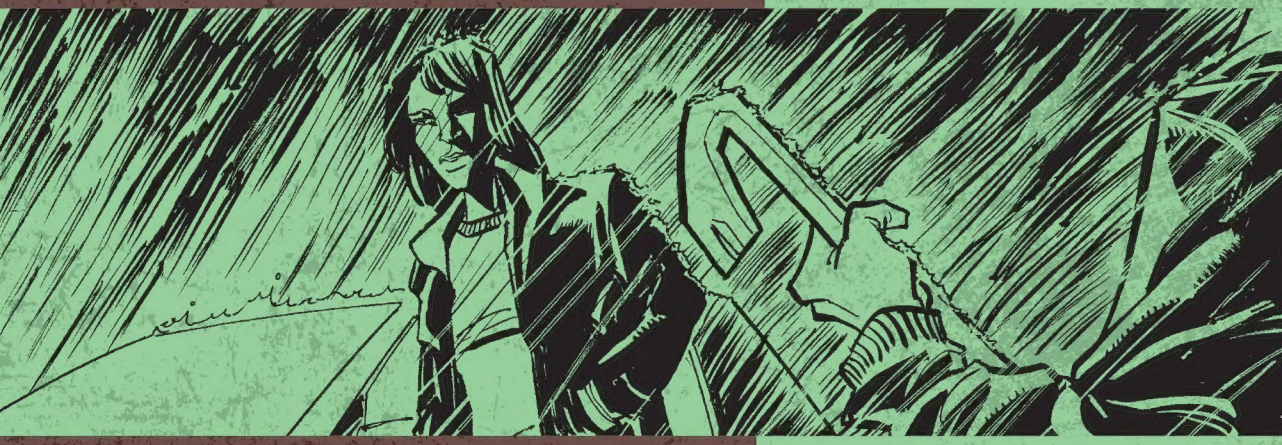

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On Stumptown

Sometimes you get exactly what you want. Those are usually the times when you should be extra-vigilant, I think. Pinch yourself to make sure you're awake.

You know what I mean. Things seem to line up just right, everything seems to be going according to plan and it all feels good. Something's gotta be wrong, right?

Usually, yeah, there's a hair in your soup. A wrinkle you didn't expect, a surprise of some kind. A catch.

Every blue moon, though, that thing you wanted? When it arrives, it's exactly that. And you couldn't be happier.

It happened to me with this book. Welcome to *Stumptown*.

The best hardboiled PI stories consistently feature two things: a compelling, memorable protagonist and a live, pulsing, and vibrant setting. The place is as much of a character as the lead. Think Marlowe and the smeared lipstick of post-WWII Los Angeles. Matt Scudder and the bristled, scuffed and dangerous New York City. Tess Monaghan and the quirky corners of deadly Baltimore. These are worlds unto themselves, places we as readers want to explore through the eyes of flawed, human characters that we care for and yell at. It's no easy feat. Which is why I felt almost tricked when I first picked up a copy of *Stumptown* #1. Some things are too good to be true, right?

But it delivers.

With *Stumptown*, writer Greg Rucka and artist Justin Greenwood have not only introduced an authentic, new and memorable protagonist with the imperfect and all-too-human Dex Parios, they've dropped her into a place that is tailor-made for tales of noir and crime: Portland.

Dex, the owner of Stumptown Investigations, is a hard luck hero in the best possible way. Smart, inquisitive and prone to stumbling into trouble, but also prone to streaks of bad luck and crappy decisions, Dex is the friend you always root for and brace yourself to be disappointed by. Dex feels all-too-real. It's almost disconcerting.

But this isn't breaking news. *Stumptown* has proven to be a remarkably consistent and excellent series, which is a testament to Rucka's knack for dialogue and his keen ability to craft a memorable and unique mystery, propelled by the charming and baggage-heavy Dex. The first handful of *Stumptown* stories were graduate courses in noir world-building, and how to cook up hardboiled tales that evoked a sense of desperation and location. The third volume of the series, which saw Greenwood join as regular artist, seemed to take an evolutionary step forward—becoming visually smoother, a bit sleeker, but still maintaining the raw, gritty edge that gives the series it's rough-hewn charm. A killer book got even better.

The book you hold in your hands is literally about killer coffee. Don't scoff. This is serious stuff. "The Case of a Cup of Joe" is no laughing matter—and deals with a subject near and dear to the heart of any

Portland resident. Not murder. Not crime. Coffee. The case finds Dex on the wrong side of a gang of baristas and between two hopped-up billionaires with six figures on the line and a chance to rule the coffee roost in a town where it's all about the coffee beans.

The strength of the story, though, isn't in the high concept—no matter how great or off-the-wall it seems. It's in the characters. Rucka has built an impressive, decades-long track record of creating complex, layered and fully-formed heroes, whether it's taking on existing concepts like *Wonder Woman* or *Batwoman* or new heroes that spring from his own imagination, like *Whiteout*, *Lazarus*, *Lady Sabre*, and *Stumptown*, to name a few.

Greenwood's art—deceptively simple, but boasting a cinematic flair that makes every line count—is the perfect complement to Rucka's complex and organic story. A style that while grounded and real, doesn't try to escape what it is—a comic book. A visual detective novel. It gives sight to a Portland only Rucka and Greenwood know, and you've got a free, all-expenses paid trip to hang out there. You don't even have to pack a bag. But do bring your travel cup.

I should note that Greg Rucka is one of my favorite people in comics. For his amazing body of work, sure, but also for him. A true friend and mentor, he'll be the first to reach out his hand to help and support, in good times and bad. There are few writers I admire more—not just for his ability to weave a story full of depth, location and heart, but for his principles and fearlessness in a creative atmosphere that is too often focused on what the next iteration of *Character X* is, instead of what the next creative frontier to explore should be. Even if you don't know him personally, it's impossible not to see that these books are a living, breathing part of him—his blood is on the page. And like the best of us, this work doesn't come easily. It's an intense, emotional, exorcism-like experience to generate these stories for Justin to visualize. That's why they feel so genuine and human. That's why Dex feels so alive.

Dex is like us. She makes mistakes. She tries to do the right thing. She has wants and desires. She has regrets.

Like us, she's still searching for that one, perfect thing. That wish turned into a reality.

You're lucky. You have it in your hands. An expertly-crafted mystery that evokes the masters of the genre while still pushing things forward.

Fill up your mug and take a seat. You're in for a hell of a story.

ALEX SEGURA
KEW GARDENS, NY
4/19/16

Alex Segura is a novelist and comic book writer. His Miami crime novels Silent City *and* Down the Darkest Street*—featuring washed up detective Pete Fernandez—are out now from Polis Books. You can find him at www.alexsegura.com or on Twitter @alex_segura.*

Chapter One

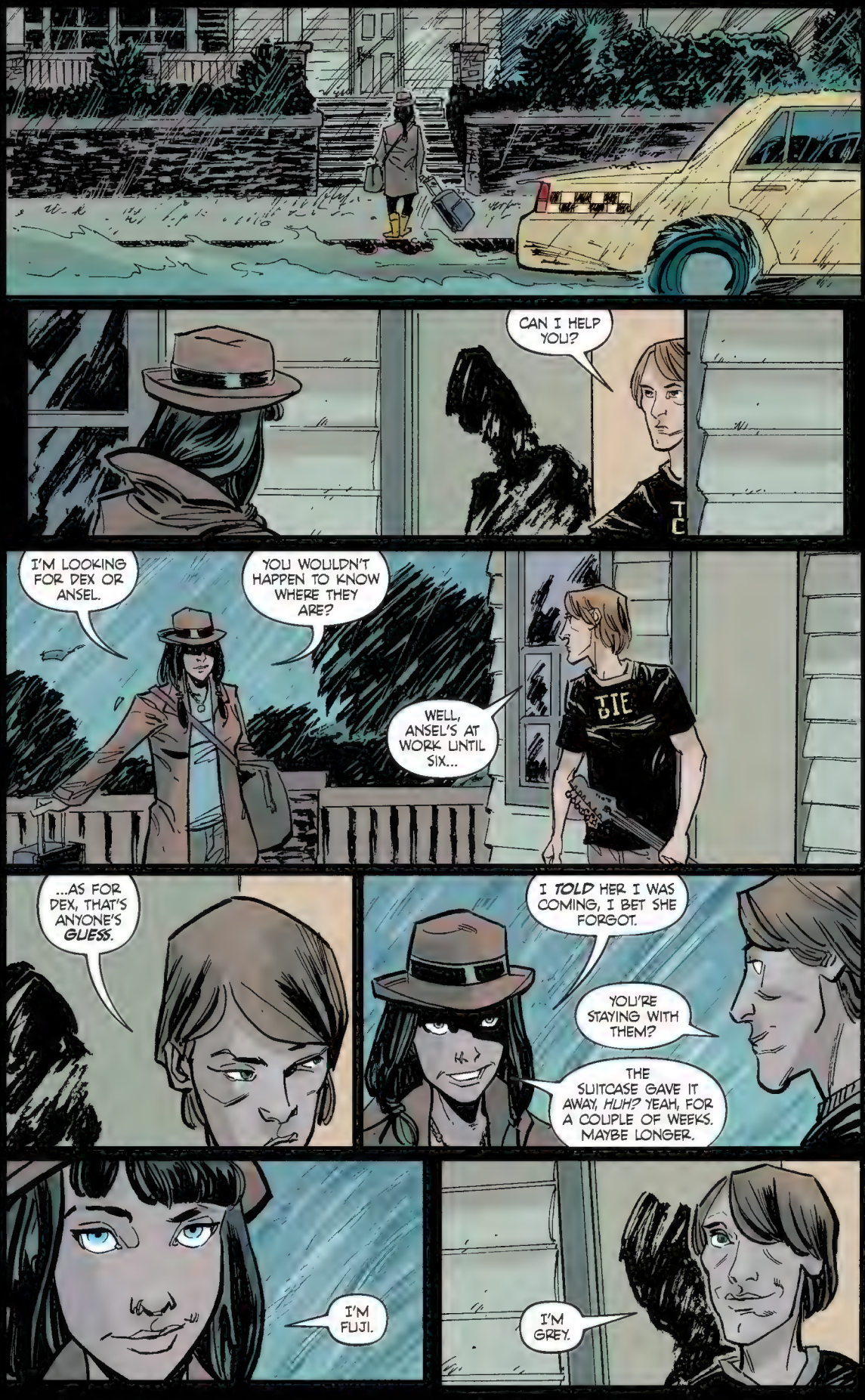
...BREAK THE CRUST AND SNIFF IT AGAIN...
...THE AROMA'S CHANGED, YOU SEE, AND NOW BRING A SAMPLE TO TASTE...
...SLURPING IS GOOD, IT ASPIRATES THE MIX...
...LET IT SIT FOR A MOMENT, LET IT RIDE YOUR TASTEBUDS AND YOU--
--
...YEAH, YOU CAN SPIT IT OUT OR SWALLOW IT, EITHER'S FINE.

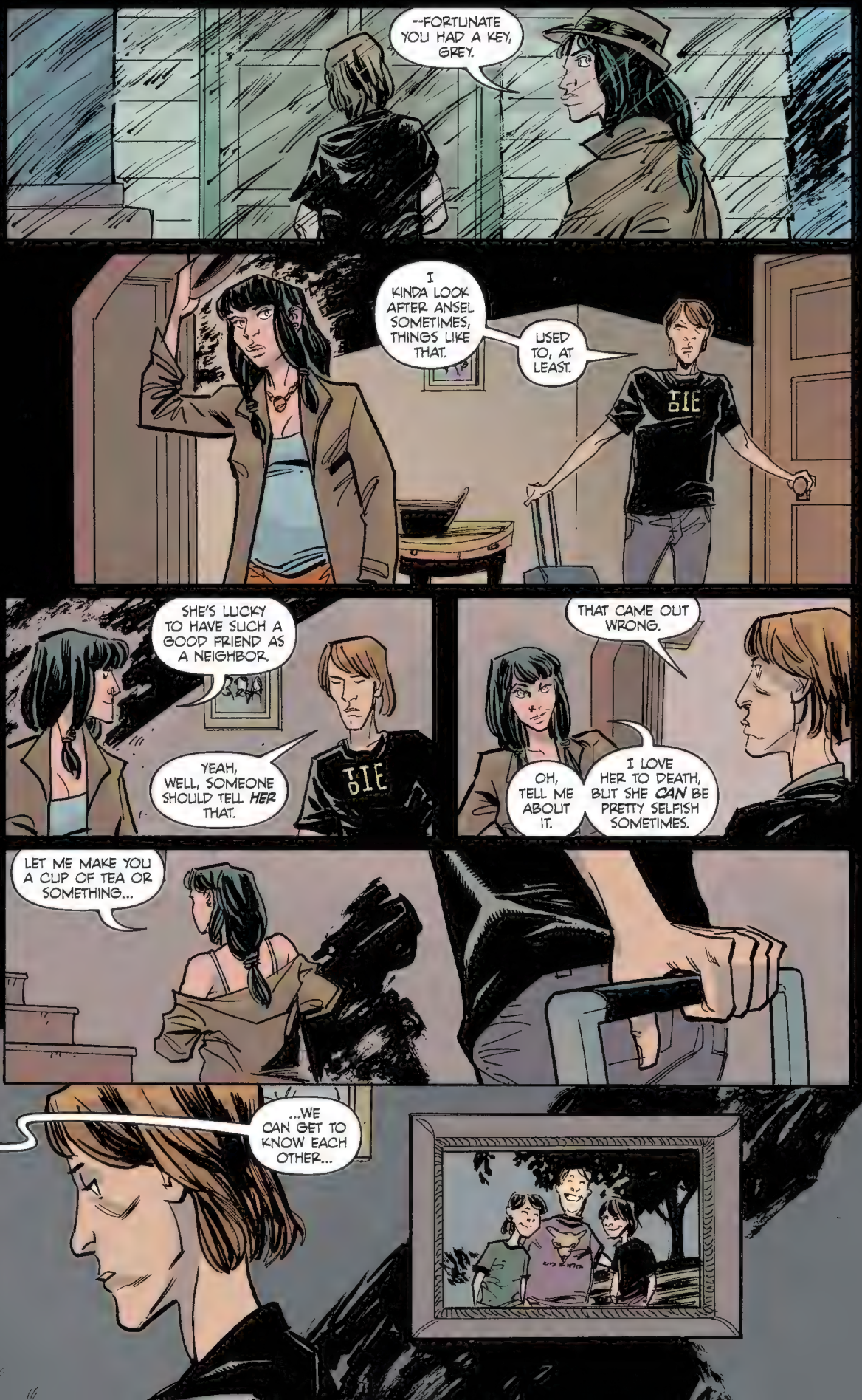
SO?
WHAT'D YOU THINK?
I THINK IT TASTES LIKE COFFEE, MISTER WEEKES.
GOOD COFFEE, BUT... Y'KNOW, COFFEE.
HEATHEN.
YOU'RE A HEATHEN, PARIOS.
THAT "GOOD COFFEE" IS CONSIDERED BY MANY TO BE THE FINEST IN THE WORLD.
THAT "GOOD COFFEE" RUNS AROUND SIX HUNDRED DOLLARS A POUND.
THERE ARE MARKETS IN EUROPE WHERE IT SELLS AS HIGH AS FOURTEEN HUNDRED A POUND.
IT'S CALLED KOPI LUWAK. COMES OUT OF SOUTHEAST ASIA.
ALSO CALLED WILD THAI CIVET COFFEE.
WHAT IS IT, PICKED BY VESTAL VIRGINS?

AND A CIVET IS...?
A TYPE OF CAT NATIVE TO AFRICA AND ASIA.
IT EATS THE COFFEE CHERRIES. THE FLESH OF THE CHERRY IS DIGESTED, AND IT EXCRETES THE BEAN.
IT'S CAT SHIT COFFEE?
PEOPLE ARE SHELLING OUT ALMOST A GRAND AND A HALF A POUND FOR CAT SHIT COFFEE?
BASICALLY, YES.
AND YOU COULDN'T TELL ME THAT BEFORE I SAMPLED IT?
THE BEANS ARE WASHED BEFORE ROASTING, MISS PARIOS.
I SHOULD FUCKING WELL HOPE SO.

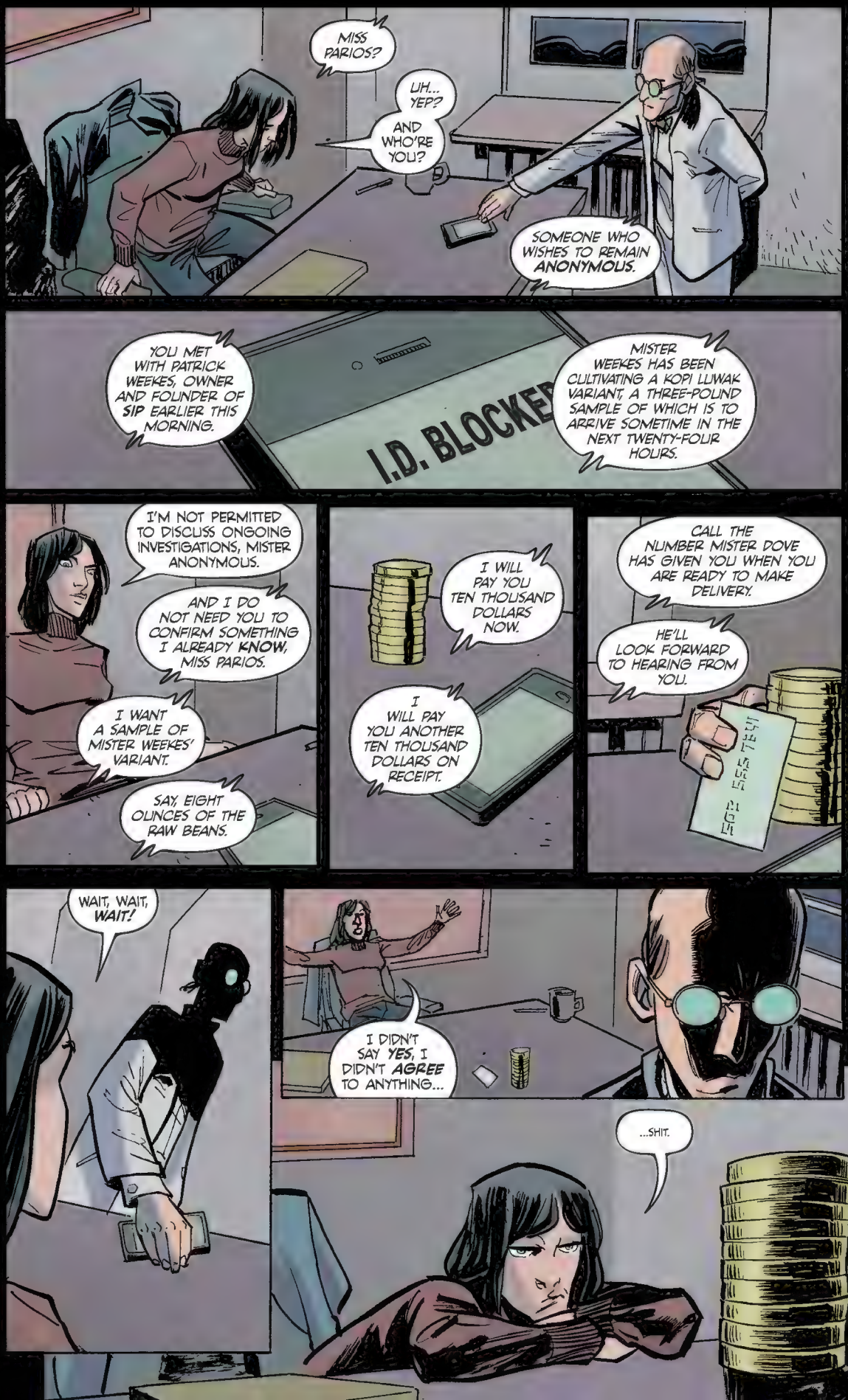
A FEW YEARS AGO IT CAME TO LIGHT THERE WERE FARMS WHERE CIVETS WERE BEING FORCE-FED BEANS.
THE CONDITIONS FOR THE ANIMALS WERE ABHORRENT. IT WAS ONLY ABOUT THE MONEY.
GREED DOES BRING OUT THE BEST IN PEOPLE.
WHICH HAS DRIVEN THE PRICE EVEN HIGHER.
COUNT ON IT. THERE WAS AN OUTCRY, RIGHTLY, THE RESULT BEING THAT WE NOW HAVE CERTIFIED CRUELTY-FREE KOPI LUWAK.
EXACTLY.
I WAS ROASTING MY OWN BEANS AT SEVENTEEN.
THE DAY I TURNED THIRTY I SOLD MY BUSINESS TO STARBUCKS FOR AN EMBARRASSING AMOUNT OF MONEY.
USED THAT TO START SIP AND TO FUND MY OWN KOPI LUWAK HARVESTS.
CRUELTY-FREE, MY CIVETS LIVE LIKE ROYALTY. IT'S TAKEN FIVE YEARS, BUT THE FIRST SAMPLE OF MY KOPI COMES IN TONIGHT ON A CHARTER.
THREE POUNDS WORTH. ABSOLUTELY UNIQUE.
I WANT YOU TO MEET THE PLANE, BRING IT TO ME.
FORTY-TWO HUNDRED DOLLARS WORTH OF COFFEE?
TRY CLOSER TO TWENTY-FIVE THOUSAND.
THIS IS THE FIRST SAMPLE OF A ONE OF A KIND COFFEE, DEX.

WHY ME?
IF YOU'RE THAT CONCERNED, HIRE AN ARMORED CAR, BRINKS, GARDA, LIKE THAT.
NO, NO, WOULD DRAW TOO MUCH ATTENTION.
YOU REALLY THINK SOMEONE'S WATCHING, WAITING TO STEAL YOUR COFFEE?
I'M NOT THE ONLY GAME IN TOWN, DEX.
SOME OF THE OTHER ROASTERS, THEY'D KILL TO GET THEIR HANDS ON WHAT I'VE GOT.
FIGURATIVELY, YOU MEAN.
IF YOU OWN A GUN, I'D BRING IT.
JUST IN CASE.
WHAT DO YOU SAY? CAN I RELY ON YOU?
AND YOU'RE PAYING FOR THIS ERRAND?
TRIPLE YOUR DAILY RATE.
I NEED THREE POUNDS OF RAW BEANS.


CAN I HELP YOU?
I'M LOOKING FOR DEX OR ANSEL.
YOU WOULDN'T HAPPEN TO KNOW WHERE THEY ARE?
WELL, ANSEL'S AT WORK UNTIL SIX...
...AS FOR DEX, THAT'S ANYONE'S *GUESS*.
I *TOLD* HER I WAS COMING, I BET SHE FORGOT.
YOU'RE STAYING WITH THEM?
THE SUITCASE GAVE IT AWAY, *HUH?* YEAH, FOR A COUPLE OF WEEKS. MAYBE LONGER.
I'M FUJI.
I'M GREY.


--FORTUNATE YOU HAD A KEY, GREY.
I KINDA LOOK AFTER ANSEL SOMETIMES, THINGS LIKE THAT.
USED TO, AT LEAST.
SHE'S LUCKY TO HAVE SUCH A GOOD FRIEND AS A NEIGHBOR.
YEAH, WELL, SOMEONE SHOULD TELL HER THAT.
THAT CAME OUT WRONG.
OH, TELL ME ABOUT IT.
I LOVE HER TO DEATH, BUT SHE CAN BE PRETTY SELFISH SOMETIMES.
LET ME MAKE YOU A CUP OF TEA OR SOMETHING...
...WE CAN GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER...

HEY, SORRY.
WAITING FOR ME?
DEXEDRINE CALLISTO PARIOS, PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR?
UH-OH, FULL NAME. YOU DID YOUR RESEARCH.
GIMME A SEC, WE CAN TALK INSIDE.
YOU ARE?
MY NAME IS MISTER DOVE.
TAKE A SEAT, MISTER DOVE.
WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?
MY EMPLOYER WISHES TO RETAIN YOUR SERVICES.

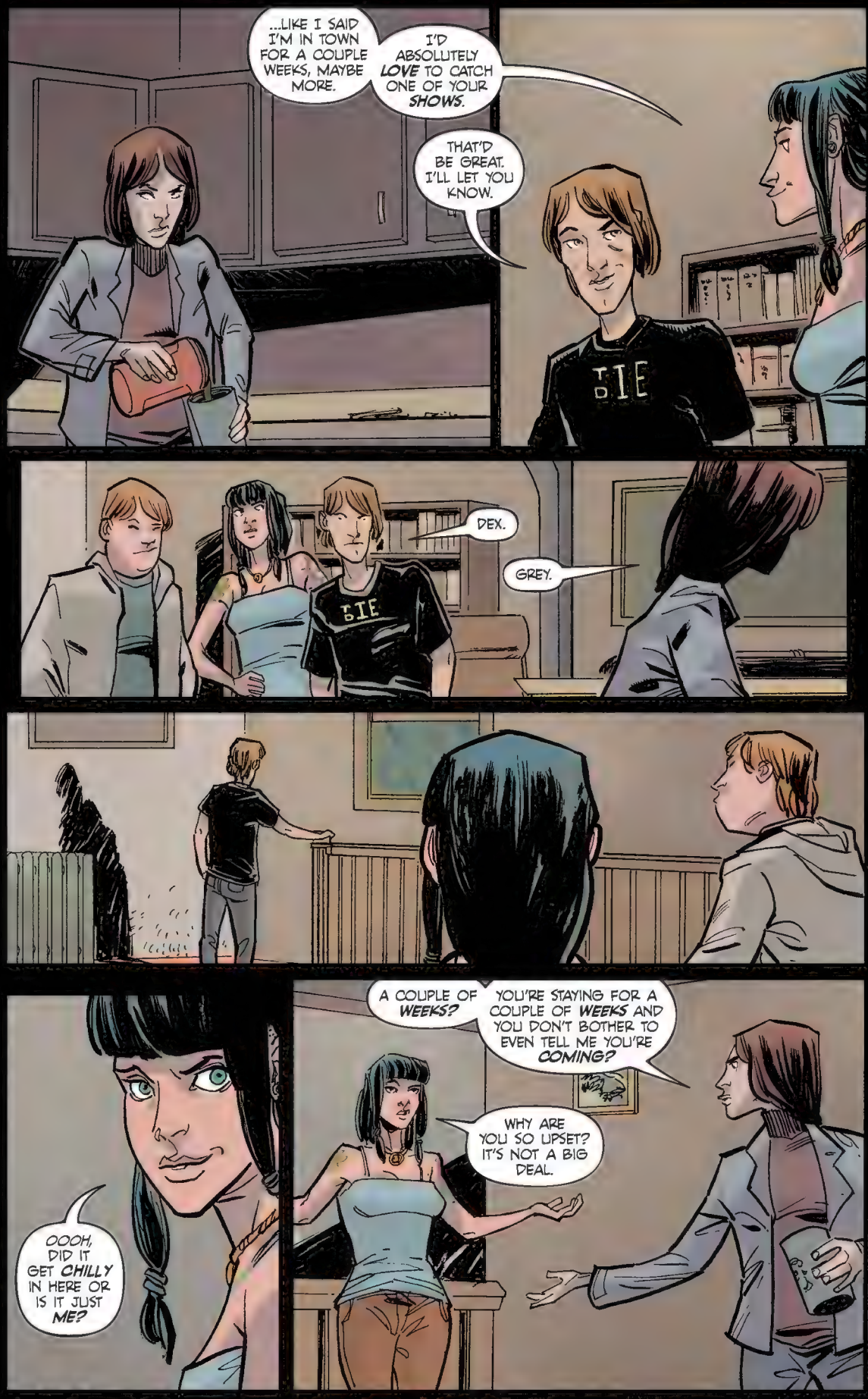

MISS PARIOS?
UH... YEP?
AND WHO'RE YOU?
SOMEONE WHO WISHES TO REMAIN ANONYMOUS.
YOU MET WITH PATRICK WEEKES, OWNER AND FOUNDER OF SIP EARLIER THIS MORNING.
I.D. BLOCKER
MISTER WEEKES HAS BEEN CULTIVATING A KOPI LUWAK VARIANT, A THREE-PUND SAMPLE OF WHICH IS TO ARRIVE SOMETIME IN THE NEXT TWENTY-FOUR HOURS.
I'M NOT PERMITTED TO DISCUSS ONGOING INVESTIGATIONS, MISTER ANONYMOUS.
AND I DO NOT NEED YOU TO CONFIRM SOMETHING I ALREADY KNOW, MISS PARIOS.
I WANT A SAMPLE OF MISTER WEEKES' VARIANT.
SAY, EIGHT OUNCES OF THE RAW BEANS.
I WILL PAY YOU TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS NOW.
I WILL PAY YOU ANOTHER TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS ON RECEIPT.
CALL THE NUMBER MISTER DOVE HAS GIVEN YOU WHEN YOU ARE READY TO MAKE DELIVERY.
HE'LL LOOK FORWARD TO HEARING FROM YOU.
WAIT, WAIT, WAIT!
I DIDN'T SAY YES, I DIDN'T AGREE TO ANYTHING...
...SHIT.

BEACONS
MARKET
SIP
SIP
Water Blend
SERIOUSLY?
I'M SORRY?
OR YOU COULD JUST DRINK MUD.
SOME PEOPLE HAVE THEIR TASTE IN THEIR ASS.

D-D-DEX!
R-READY TO GO HUH-HOME?
READY WHEN YOU ARE, ANSEL.
JUST NEED TO CHECK-OUT.
THINK THEY'LL TAKE GOLD?
YOU'RE FUNNY, DEX! I'LL G-GET CHANGED!
C-CAN WE STOP FUH-FUH-FOR MILKSHAKES?
SURE.
WHY NOT?

HEY, ANSEL?
DID YOU LEAVE THE LIGHTS ON?
MMMAYBE!
...FOR THREE MONTHS ON THE SYRIAN BORDER TRYING TO CALL ATTENTION TO WHAT'S GOING ON THERE...
...THE SITUATION IS SO MISERABLE, AND NOBODY IS DOING ANYTHING--
--ANSEL!
FUJI!!

I DUH-DUH-DIDN'T KNOW YOU W-WUH-WERE COMING TO VISIT!
DEX DIDN'T TELL YOU?
DEX DIDN'T TELL HIM BECAUSE DEX DIDN'T KNOW.
I CALLED!
NO, YOU DIDN'T, FUJI.
I'M SURE I DID, DEX.
HI, GREY!
HEY, BUDDY. HOW YOU BEEN?
GOOD!
H-HAVEN'T S-SEEN YOU FOR A L-LONG TIIME!
IT'S BEEN BUSY...
...IN FACT, I SHOULD HEAD HOME, I'VE GOT A GIG TONIGHT.
I'LL SEE Y'ALL LATER. NICE TO MEET YOU, FUJI.
A PLEASURE TO MEET YOU, GREY...
DIE


...LIKE I SAID I'M IN TOWN FOR A COUPLE WEEKS, MAYBE MORE.
I'D ABSOLUTELY *LOVE* TO CATCH ONE OF YOUR *SHOWS*.
THAT'D BE GREAT. I'LL LET YOU KNOW.
DEX.
GREY.
A COUPLE OF *WEEKS*?
YOU'RE STAYING FOR A COUPLE OF *WEEKS* AND YOU DON'T BOTHER TO EVEN TELL ME YOU'RE *COMING*?
WHY ARE YOU SO UPSET? IT'S NOT A BIG DEAL.
OOOH, DID IT GET *CHILLY* IN HERE OR IS IT JUST *ME*?

I'M UPSET BECAUSE YOU DON'T JUST DROP IN ON PEOPLE UNANNOUNCED, FUJI!
I'M YOUR SISTER, I DIDN'T THINK I NEEDED A RESERVATION!
WHY ARE YOU EVEN HERE?
JUST NEEDED A PLACE TO CRASH WHILE YOU WAIT FOR YOUR NEXT INSPIRATION?
I'M WORKING ON A COMMISSION, THANK YOU VERY MUCH!
SHAFFER HAS ME IN RESIDENCE FOR SIX WEEKS, AND I'LL BE TEACHING--
SIX WEEKS?!
YOU DROP IN UNANNOUNCED AND NOW YOU'RE STAYING FOR SIX FUCKING WEEKS?
THEY OFFERED TO PUT ME UP BUT I TOLD THEM I COULD STAY WITH YOU.
NO FIGHTING.
YOU KNOW WHAT? I'M WORKING, I'VE GOT SOMEPLACE TO BE.
WE CAN TALK ABOUT THIS WHEN I GET BACK.
MAKE SURE ANSEL GETS SOME DINNER.

PARIOS?
THAT'S RIGHT. CAPTAIN POE?

THAT'S ME.
NOT TO BE PARANOID, BUT YOU GOT ANY I.D.?
NOT PARANOID AT ALL.
YOUR PARENTS NAMED YOU "DEXEDRINE?"
ONLY THE LEAST OF THEIR SINS, CAPTAIN.
THAT KINDA THING WILL MESS YOU UP.
YOU'VE NO IDEA.
CHECKS OUT?
LOOKS GOOD TO ME.
PLEASURE DOING BUSINESS WITH YOU.

ARE YOU SHITTING ME?
RIGHT...
...LET'S DO THIS.

OHH--

--SHIT!!

DUDE... DUDE...
WHERE...

...WHERE'D SHE GO?
NOT FAR.
GET OUT. BOTH OF YOU.
HUH? NO! WHY?
BECAUSE IF YOU DON'T I WILL SHOOT YOU.
HOW'S THAT FOR A REASON?
THAT'S A GOOD REASON.
DUDE.
BEARDO, OVER HERE.
STAY WHERE I CAN SEE YOU BOTH.

YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE A GUN. I BET YOU DON'T HAVE A GUN.
ONE SURE WAY TO FIND OUT.
AW, C'MON!
DUDE!
COUPLE THINGS.
FIRST, YOU GUYS SUCK AT TAILING, I MEAN, I MADE YOU BEFORE I PULLED OUT OF THE LOT.
SECOND...
...I TOLD DOVE AND HIS BOSS NO, I MEANT FUCKING NO.
AND THIRD...
YOU WERE RIGHT, THERE WAS NO GUN.
HAVE A NICE NIGHT.

Chapter Two

YOU HAVE IT?
TAKE A LOOK.

I'VE BEEN SITTING HERE *WAITING* FOR YOU.
I'M ACTUALLY *NERVOUS*, CAN YOU BELIEVE THAT?
I *CAN* ACTUALLY BELIEVE THAT...
...IT'S WORTH, WHAT, TWENTY-FIVE GRAND?
UHM...
...I, UH...
I CHANGED THE *CONTAINERS*, MISTER WEEKES.
SECURITY PRECAUTION.
PATRICK, I TOLD YOU. CALL ME PATRICK.
THAT WAS *SMART*--

--OHHH...
DEX.
DEX DEX DEX--

FUCKING PERFECT!
SORRY.
I GET... I'M A LITTLE PASSIONATE ABOUT MY WORK.
I CAN SEE THAT.
I'M GONNA ROAST SOME OF THESE.
YOU HAVE TO STAY FOR COFFEE.
YOU'LL STAY FOR COFFEE?
SURE.

IP
THAT IS A GOOD CUP OF COFFEE.
IT'S... NICE, SURE.
HEATHEN.
SO THERE'S SOMETHING YOU SHOULD KNOW.
THERE WAS SOMEBODY ELSE VERY INTERESTED IN GETTING YOUR CAT-SHIT COFFEE.
CIVET-FARMED KOPI LUWAK, THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
I TOLD YOU THERE'D BE OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES.
WELL THIS INTERESTED PARTY SENT AN ODDBALL TO MY OFFICE YESTERDAY AFTER I'D MET WITH YOU.
SAID ODDBALL OFFERED-BY-PROXY TO PAY ME TWENTY GRAND FOR EIGHT OUNCES OF YOUR BEANS. IN GOLD COINS.

I BRING THIS UP NOW SO YOU KNOW I'M NOT TRYING TO SHAKE YOU DOWN FOR MORE MONEY.
BECAUSE I OBVIOUSLY TURNED HIM DOWN.
I APPRECIATE THAT. THIS PROXY--
WAIT, IT GETS BETTER.
I WAS FOLLOWED FROM THE AIRPORT TONIGHT.
TWO MEN, PURE PDX-HIPSTERS. I THOUGHT AT FIRST THEY WERE WITH THE PROXY, BUT THINKING ABOUT IT ON MY WAY OVER HERE, I'M NOT SO SURE.
THE... AESTHETIC DOESN'T MATCH.
THIS PROXY, TALL AND THIN?
WORE WHITE?
CALLED HIMSELF MISTER DOVE.
PUT HIS EMPLOYER ON SPEAKERPHONE TO MAKE THE OFFER.
LAIDLAW.
WAIT, THE TECH GUY? WHY WOULD HE WANT YOUR COFFEE?
BECAUSE, SPEAKING AS A RICH MAN MYSELF, YOU GET USED TO GETTING WHAT YOU WANT.
BUT WHEN YOU'RE AN APPALLINGLY RICH MAN, "NO" ISN'T A WORD YOU EVER HEAR.
HE TRIED TO BUY MY STOCK, THE FARM, ALL OF IT, LAST YEAR.
AND I SAID NO.

HE'S WORTH... I MEAN, NO OFFENSE, BUT HE MAKES YOU LOOK LIKE A PAUPER.
IF LAIDLAW WANTS CAT-SHIT COFFEE, WHY DOESN'T HE JUST PAY TO MAKE IT HIMSELF?
HE DOESN'T WANT KOPI LUWAK, DEX.
HE WANTS MY KOPI LUWAK.
AS TO THE OTHER TWO, I DON'T KNOW. THE BARISTA MAFIA, MAYBE.
THE WHAT-HEY-NOW?
PROBABLY NOTHING.
LISTEN, I'VE ANOTHER SHIPMENT, SAME AS THIS ONE, SCHEDULED FOR DELIVERY A WEEK FROM TODAY.
WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO HANDLE THAT ONE AS WELL?
WHY NOT?

ANSEL?
IT'S PAST TWO IN THE MORNING, WHAT'RE YOU STILL DOING UP?
Y-YOU'RE BACK.
YOU'VE GOT WORK IN THE MORNING, ANSEL, YOU'VE GOT TO GET YOUR SLEEP.
I KNOW, I KNOW.
...I J-J-JUST...
JUST WHAT? DID SOMETHING HAPPEN?
...I C-CAN'T SLEEP W-WHEN WHEN WHEN NOBODY AND IT'S SCARY DEX!
IT'S SCARY W-WH-WHE-WHEN I'M ALONE!
WHERE'S FUJI, ANSEL?

...COME IN FOR A DRINK...
THOUGHT YOU SAID YOU HAD ROOMMATES...

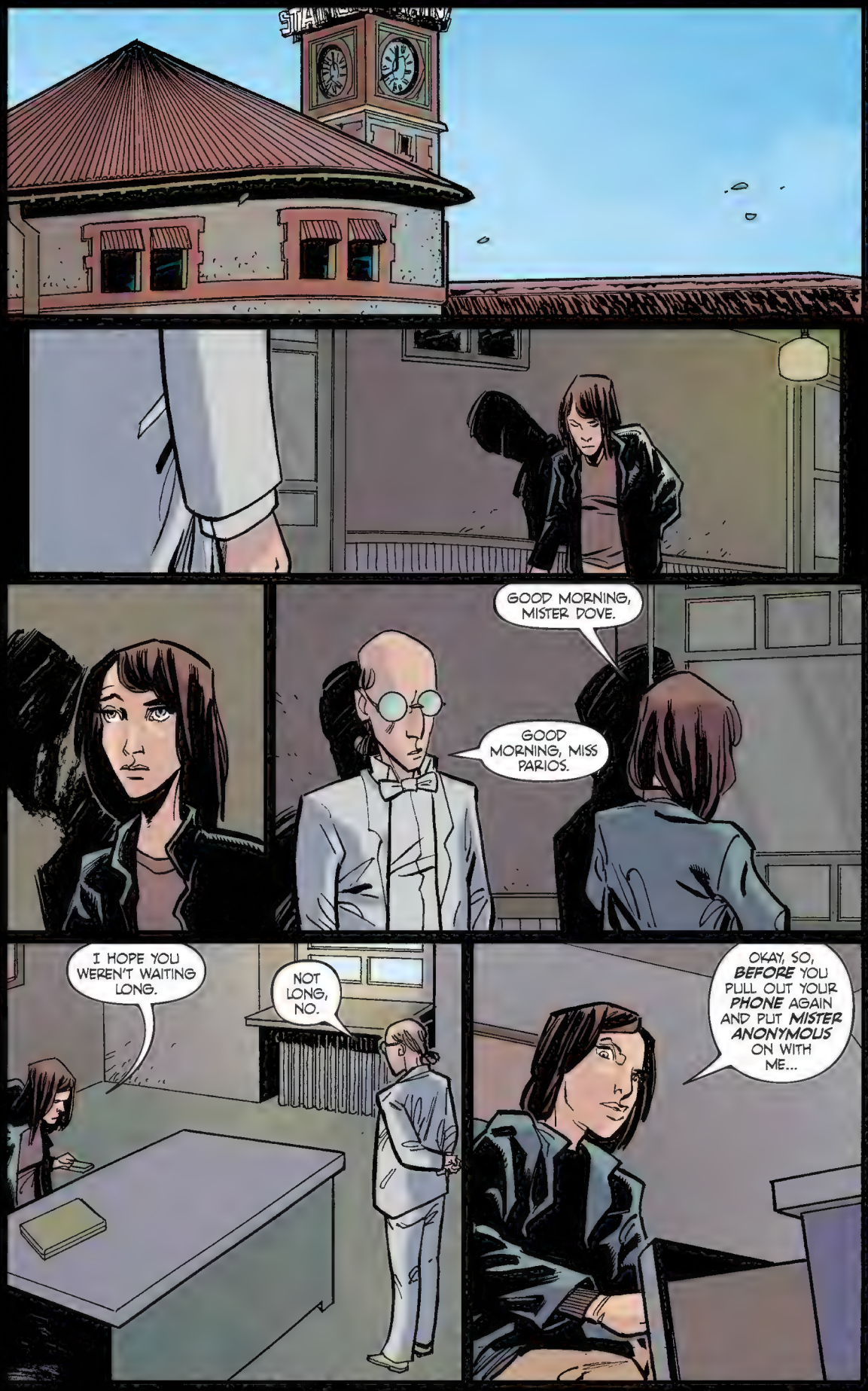
...I MEAN IF YOU'RE SURE--
THEY WON'T CARE, IT'LL BE FINE--
GET OUT.
DEX? I THOUGHT YOU--
HE LEAVES.
NOW.
I GUESS YOU BETTER GO.
SOME OTHER TIME, OKAY?
OH.
YEAH, OKAY...
...CALL ME SOMETIME?

I PUT MY THINGS IN THE GUEST ROOM.
AT LEAST I PRESUMED IT WAS THE GUEST ROOM, IT WAS KINDA CLUTTERED IN THERE--
YOU LEFT ANSEL ALONE.
IS THAT WHY YOU'RE SUDDENLY FULL BITCH?
YOU SAID TO MAKE SURE ANSEL GOT DINNER. YOU DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING ABOUT ME NEEDING TO BABYSIT HIM.
I FIGURED YOU'D BE BACK SOON, AND HE'S A BIG BOY, HE CAN TAKE CARE OF HIMSELF.
SERIOUSLY, IS THAT WHAT THIS IS ABOUT?
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO HAD TO GO TO "WORK," NOT ME.
YOU KNOW, AS FAR AS THAT GOES, YOU REALLY SHOULD BE TAKING BETTER CARE OF HIM.
WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN FEEDING HIM, ANYWAY? HE'S PUT ON TEN POUNDS SINCE I LAST SAW HIM.
I WENT THROUGH YOUR KITCHEN AND I COULDN'T FIND ANYTHING THAT WAS GLUTEN-FREE...

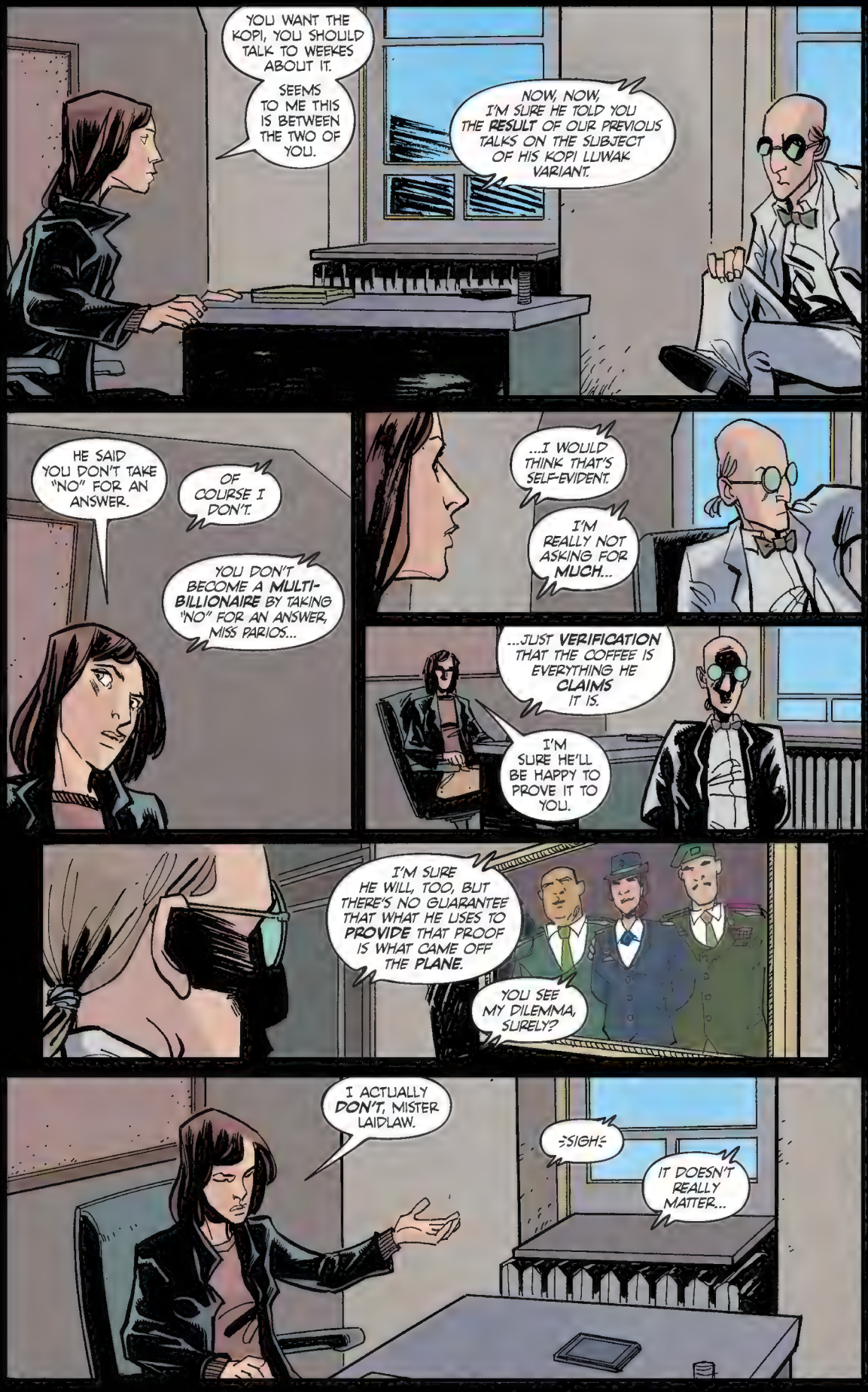
...OR WASN'T PRE-PACKAGED...
...AND YOU'RE SMOKING AROUND HIM, TOO, SERIOUSLY, DEX...
...YOU *REALLY* NEED TO BE MORE CONSCIENTIOUS OF HIS *NEEDS*...
...I MEAN YOU'RE...
...YOU'RE *RESPONSIBLE*...
...FOR HIM...
YES, I *AM*.
UNLIKE *YOU*.
OR *MOM*.
OR *DAD*.
I EXPECT YOU OUT OF HERE IN THE MORNING, FUJI.

HA HAH HAH HA!
SO THEN I SAID, I MAY BE CHEAP, BUT I'M NOT EASY!
HA HAH HAH HA!!

DEX!
FUJI GOT DOUGHNUTS!
DEX.
DEX! HEY, GOOD MORNING, SLEEPYHEAD!
ACTUALLY, GREY GOT THE DOUGHNUTS AT MY REQUEST.
NOTHING LIKE A LITTLE SUGAR TO GET THE DAY STARTED RIGHT!
RIGHT?
HEY, ANSEL, YOU READY TO GO TO WORK?
FIGURED WE COULD TAKE THE BUS TOGETHER IF YOU LIKE, THEN I'LL GO SIGHTSEEING.
ARMY
I CAN GIVE YOU GUYS A LIFT, IF YOU WANT.
YES! PLEASE!
THAT'S VERY SWEET OF YOU, GREY, THANK YOU!
WE'LL SEE YOU TONIGHT, DEX!
ARMY


GOOD MORNING, MISTER DOVE.
GOOD MORNING, MISS PARIOS.
I HOPE YOU WEREN'T WAITING LONG.
NOT LONG, NO.
OKAY, SO, BEFORE YOU PULL OUT YOUR PHONE AGAIN AND PUT MISTER ANONYMOUS ON WITH ME...

...HERE'S THE MONEY YOU OFFERED YESTERDAY.
AND WHICH I DID NOT ACCEPT BUT RATHER HAVE BEEN HOLDING, AS I NEVER AGREED TO PERFORM SERVICES FOR YOU OR YOUR EMPLOYER...
...MISTER LAIDLAW.
MOST PEOPLE WOULD THINK TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS IN EXCHANGE FOR EIGHT OUNCES OF RAW COFFEE BEANS TO BE VERY EASY MONEY, INDEED.
YOU'RE EITHER PRINCIPLED OR AN IDIOT, MISS PARIOS.
YOU'RE GOING TO MAKE ME BLUSH, MISTER LAIDLAW.
NO PRIZES FOR CLEVERNESS. I'M SURE PATRICK TOLD YOU I WAS INTERESTED WHEN YOU MADE THE DELIVERY LAST NIGHT.


YOU WANT THE KOPI, YOU SHOULD TALK TO WEEKES ABOUT IT.
SEEMS TO ME THIS IS BETWEEN THE TWO OF YOU.
NOW, NOW, I'M SURE HE TOLD YOU THE RESULT OF OUR PREVIOUS TALKS ON THE SUBJECT OF HIS KOPI LUWAK VARIANT.
HE SAID YOU DON'T TAKE "NO" FOR AN ANSWER.
OF COURSE I DON'T.
YOU DON'T BECOME A MULTI-BILLIONAIRE BY TAKING "NO" FOR AN ANSWER, MISS PARIOS...
...I WOULD THINK THAT'S SELF-EVIDENT.
I'M REALLY NOT ASKING FOR MUCH...
...JUST VERIFICATION THAT THE COFFEE IS EVERYTHING HE CLAIMS IT IS.
I'M SURE HE'LL BE HAPPY TO PROVE IT TO YOU.
I'M SURE HE WILL, TOO, BUT THERE'S NO GUARANTEE THAT WHAT HE USES TO PROVIDE THAT PROOF IS WHAT CAME OFF THE PLANE.
YOU SEE MY DILEMMA, SURELY?
I ACTUALLY DON'T, MISTER LAIDLAW.
:SIGH:
IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER...

...I KNOW FOR A TRUTH THAT ANOTHER SHIPMENT WILL BE FLOWN IN SIX DAYS FROM TODAY...
...ANOTHER THREE POUNDS OF MISTER WEEKES' KOPI LUWAK...
...TO BE USED AS A SECOND SAMPLE TO MEASURE FOR CONSISTENCY WITH THE FIRST...
...AGAIN, I MUST INSIST THAT YOU SPARE ME A PORTION OF THAT DELIVERY...
...SAY A FULL POUND THIS TIME, SURELY?
THAT SEEMS MORE THAN FAIR IN EXCHANGE FOR TWENTY THOUSAND TAX-FREE DOLLARS.
MISTER DOVE WILL BE IN TOUCH ONCE YOU HAVE THE BEANS.
SIX DAYS, MISS PARIOS.

--BROKE, WOULD IT BE OKAY IF I BORROWED YOURS?
NO.
DEX. YOU'RE JUST BEING CONTRARY.
THESE HAD DUST ON THEM, YOU DON'T EVEN WEAR THEM!
NOT "NO YOU CAN'T BORROW THEM," FUJI.
"NO," AS IN, "I HAVE TO WORK TONIGHT, I NEED YOU TO STAY HERE WITH ANSEL."
I MADE PLANS, DEX.
AND I TOLD YOU THIS YESTERDAY, AND THE DAY BEFORE, AND THE DAY BEFORE THAT.
WELL, HOW LATE WILL YOU BE?
I DON'T KNOW, IT DEPENDS.
ON WHAT?
ON WHETHER OR NOT I RUN INTO TROUBLE.
MAKE SURE ANSEL HAS DINNER.

OH, FOR THE LOVE OF...
ARE WE REALLY GOING TO DO THIS AGAIN, GUYS?
WE DON'T WANT TO HAVE TO FUCK YOU UP, LADY!
JUST GIVE US THE BEANS!
NO.
C'MON, YOU'RE NOT FOOLING US THE SAME WAY TWICE--
BLAMM

DUDE...
...DUDE...
...DUDE!
JESUS, NOT AGAIN.
DUDE! OUR PANTS, DUDE!
MY PANTS NOW...
...DUDE.

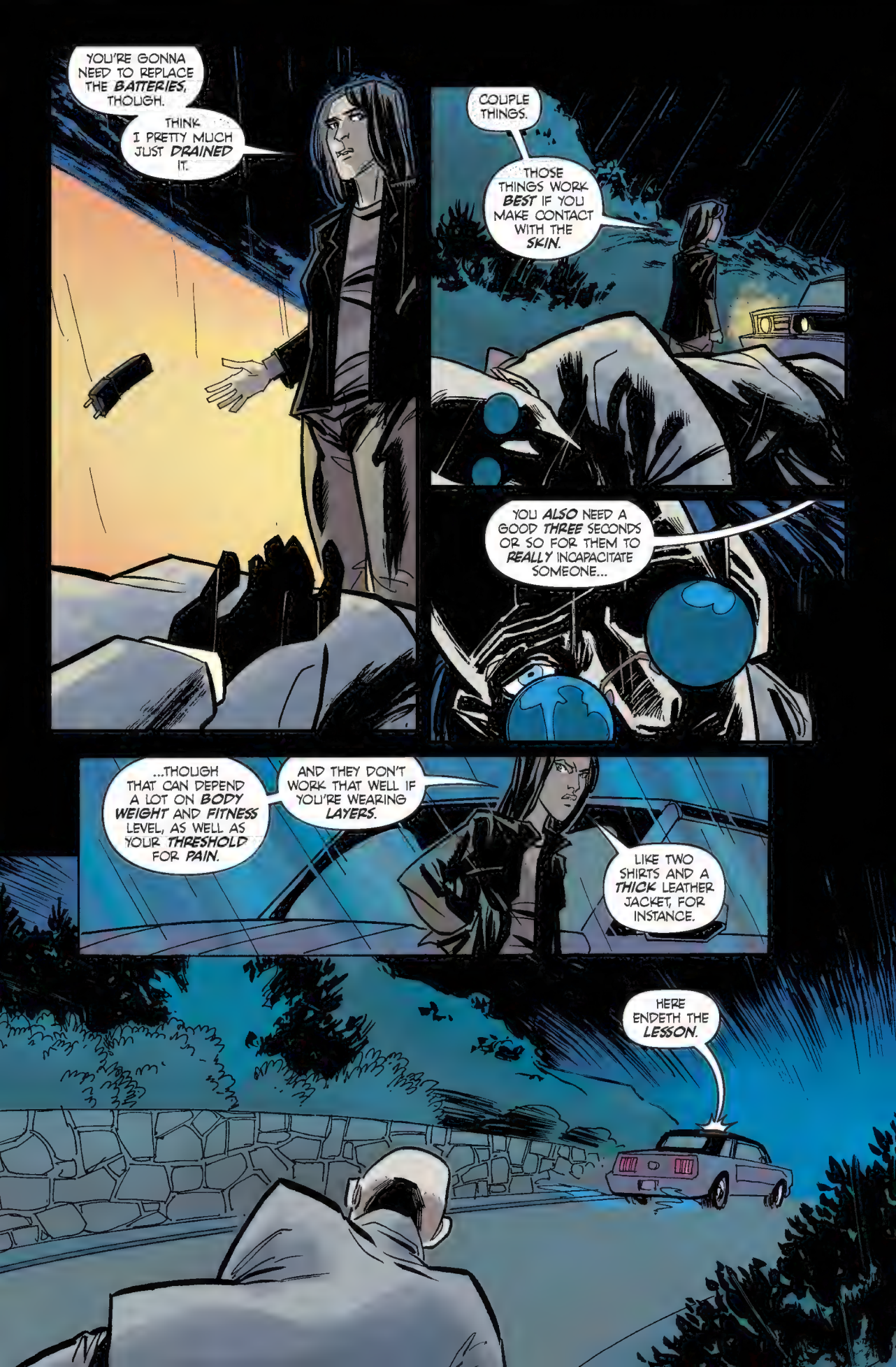
Chapter Three

JERKS.
I MEAN, SERIOUSLY...
...ALL THIS FOR A BUNCH OF BEANS?
BARISTA MAFIA BULLSHIT...
...LIKE I'M JACK-AND-THE-GODDAMN-BEANSTALK--
--SHIT!

JESUS CHRIST, DOVE!
WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH YOU?! YOU WANT TO BE WEARING GRILL MARKS ON THAT NICE WHITE SUIT OF YOURS?
I TOLD YOU AND I TOLD LAIDLAW IT WAS NO GO!
THEY'RE FUCKING COFFEE BEANS--
--WHY DOESN'T ANYBODY TAKE "NO" FOR AN ANSWER?!
I SWEAR TO GOD THIS TOWN--

ZZZAAKKK
ZZZAAKKK
ZZAKK
ZK
HAVING A LITTLE TROUBLE THERE, MISTER DOVE?
IT APPEARS TO BE MALFUNCTIONING.
HERE...
...LET ME SEE.

ZZZAA
AAAAA
AAKKK
NOPE.
WORKS JUST FINE, MISTER DOVE.


YOU'RE GONNA NEED TO REPLACE THE BATTERIES, THOUGH.
I THINK I PRETTY MUCH JUST DRAINED IT.
COUPLE THINGS.
THOSE THINGS WORK BEST IF YOU MAKE CONTACT WITH THE SKIN.
YOU ALSO NEED A GOOD THREE SECONDS OR SO FOR THEM TO REALLY INCAPACITATE SOMEONE...
...THOUGH THAT CAN DEPEND A LOT ON BODY WEIGHT AND FITNESS LEVEL, AS WELL AS YOUR THRESHOLD FOR PAIN.
AND THEY DON'T WORK THAT WELL IF YOU'RE WEARING LAYERS.
LIKE TWO SHIRTS AND A THICK LEATHER JACKET, FOR INSTANCE.
HERE ENDETH THE LESSON.

DEX!
I WAS STARTING TO GET WORRIED!
YOU RUN INTO TROUBLE?
NO...
...I MANAGED TO HIT MY BRAKES IN TIME.
OH DEAR.
WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?
MUTT AND JEFF OF THE QUOTE-BARISTA MAFIA-UNQUOTE TRIED TO JACK ME AGAIN!

AND MISTER DOVE TRIED TO AMBUSH ME LIKE IN SOME DAMN BOND MOVIE--
AMBUSH?
--WITH A STUN GUN THAT HE THANKFULLY DIDN'T HAVE THE FIRST IDEA HOW TO USE!
THEY'RE FUCKING COFFEE BEANS, PATRICK!
THEY'RE NOT FUCKING NUCLEAR FUCKING LAUNCH CODES!
THIS WHOLE THING IS ABSURD.
LET ME MAKE YOU A CUP OF COFFEE.

A LOT OF PEOPLE THINK OF THIS AS SCIENCE, AND THERE'S CERTAINLY AN ELEMENT OF THAT AT WORK...
...PROPER TEMP FOR THE BEST EXTRACTION, METHOD OF GRINDING--BURR IS ALWAYS PREFERRED--RIGHT UP TO FILTRATION METHOD...
...THE LIST GOES ON AND ON...
...BUT WITH ALL OF THAT IN MIND, THERE IS AN ELEMENT OF ARTISTRY INVOLVED, OR AT LEAST I'D LIKE TO THINK SO.
ANY IDIOT CAN LEARN TO READ A TEMPERATURE GAUGE.
BUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT ISSUES OF TASTE, WE ENTER THE REALM OF THE SUBJECTIVE.
WHAT'S AMAZING TO ME MAY BE ENTIRELY BORING TO YOU.
"JUST COFFEE" TO YOU MIGHT BE A TRANSCENDENT EXPERIENCE TO ANOTHER.
THESE GUYS AREN'T CHASING THE SPIRITUAL, PATRICK. DO YOU GET THIS?
THREE SEPARATE PEOPLE TRIED TO USE VIOLENCE TO GET YOUR BEANS TONIGHT!
AND THAT'S ANOTHER THING. LAIDLAW TOLD ME HE KNEW WHEN THE NEXT SHIPMENT OF BEANS WAS ARRIVING.
TWICE THE HIPSTER-BARISTAS INTERCEPTED ME.
HOW DO THEY KNOW?
I MAY HAVE... MENTIONED SOMETHING ABOUT IT IN THE COMMUNITY.
BREET BREET
COFFEE'S READY.

YOU ARE FUCKING KIDDING ME.
YOU'RE THE LEAK?
I WOULDN'T... I WOULDN'T PUT IT LIKE THAT, I NEVER SAID WHERE OR WHEN...
...ONLY THAT MY KOPI LUWAK WAS FINALLY READY AND I WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO SAMPLING IT.
DID YOU GIVE THEM MY NAME, TOO?
NEVER MIND, I DON'T CARE, I DON'T WANT TO CARE.
WE'RE DONE, RIGHT? THAT'S IT?
I'LL SEND YOU MY BILL IN THE MORNING.
UHM.
ACTUALLY, THERE'S... THERE'S A LAST SAMPLE SCHEDULED TO ARRIVE...
...TOMORROW.
YOU SURE YOU WON'T STAY FOR A CUP OF COFFEE?

RUSTLE
WHMP
SKRRTCH
THUNK
SCRRRRAPE
KATHUNK
FUCK!
KLATTER

C'MON THERE'S GOT TO BE SOMETHING--
WHAT.
ARE.
YOU.
DOING?
COOKING?
I HAVE A GUN IN MY HAND, FUJI.
WITH BULLETS IN IT.

OH, GIVE IT A REST, DEX.
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO SHOOT ME.
I DON'T KNOW, I'VE GOT A FRIEND WHO'S A COP...
...SHE'D BELIEVE ME IF I SAID I THOUGHT I WAS BEING ROBBED.
WHICH IS EXACTLY WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE.
I TOLD YOU, I WAS COOKING.
SO HOW WAS YOUR NIGHT?
I WAS ATTACKED BY THREE SEPARATE PEOPLE OVER COFFEE BEANS.
WHY ARE YOU GOING THROUGH MY EVERYTHING?
I TOLD YOU, I WAS--
FUJI, IF YOU SAY THE WORD "COOKING" AGAIN, I WILL SHOOT YOU, I SWEAR TO FUCKING GOD.
I'VE BEEN MEANING TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT THAT. YOU SWEAR WAY TOO MUCH, ANSEL HEARS--
FUJI CASSANDRA.
I FIGURED YOU HAD TO HAVE SOME EMERGENCY FUNDS HIDDEN SOMEWHERE.
I WAS LOOKING FOR MONEY, OKAY?

THERE IS NO JOB, IS THERE, FUJI?
NO COMMISSIONS, NO TEACHING GIG, NOTHING LIKE THAT.
STUFF KEEPS FALLING THROUGH.
SURE.
IT DOES!
I DID THIS STUDIO GIG IN LA, AND I HAD LIKE, THREE JOBS LINED UP AFTER THAT, BUT IT ALL...
...EVAPORATED.
THAT'S WHY YOU'RE HERE.
FREE RENT, FREE ROOM, FREE BOARD.
SO YOU WERE GOING TO JUST ROB ME AND TAKE OFF?
DEPENDED ON HOW MUCH MONEY I FOUND, I GUESS.
SEE, I CAN'T TELL IF YOU'RE JOKING OR NOT, FUJI.

MAN, YOU REALLY DON'T THINK MUCH OF ME, DO YOU?
YOU'VE YET TO PROVE ME WRONG, LITTLE SISTER.
LOOK, FUJI, IT'S THREE IN THE MORNING. I'M EXHAUSTED.
JUST... JUST CLEAN THIS MESS UP AND PUT EVERYTHING AWAY AND WE CAN TALK ABOUT IT TOMORROW, OKAY?
WE BOTH NEED SOME SLEEP.

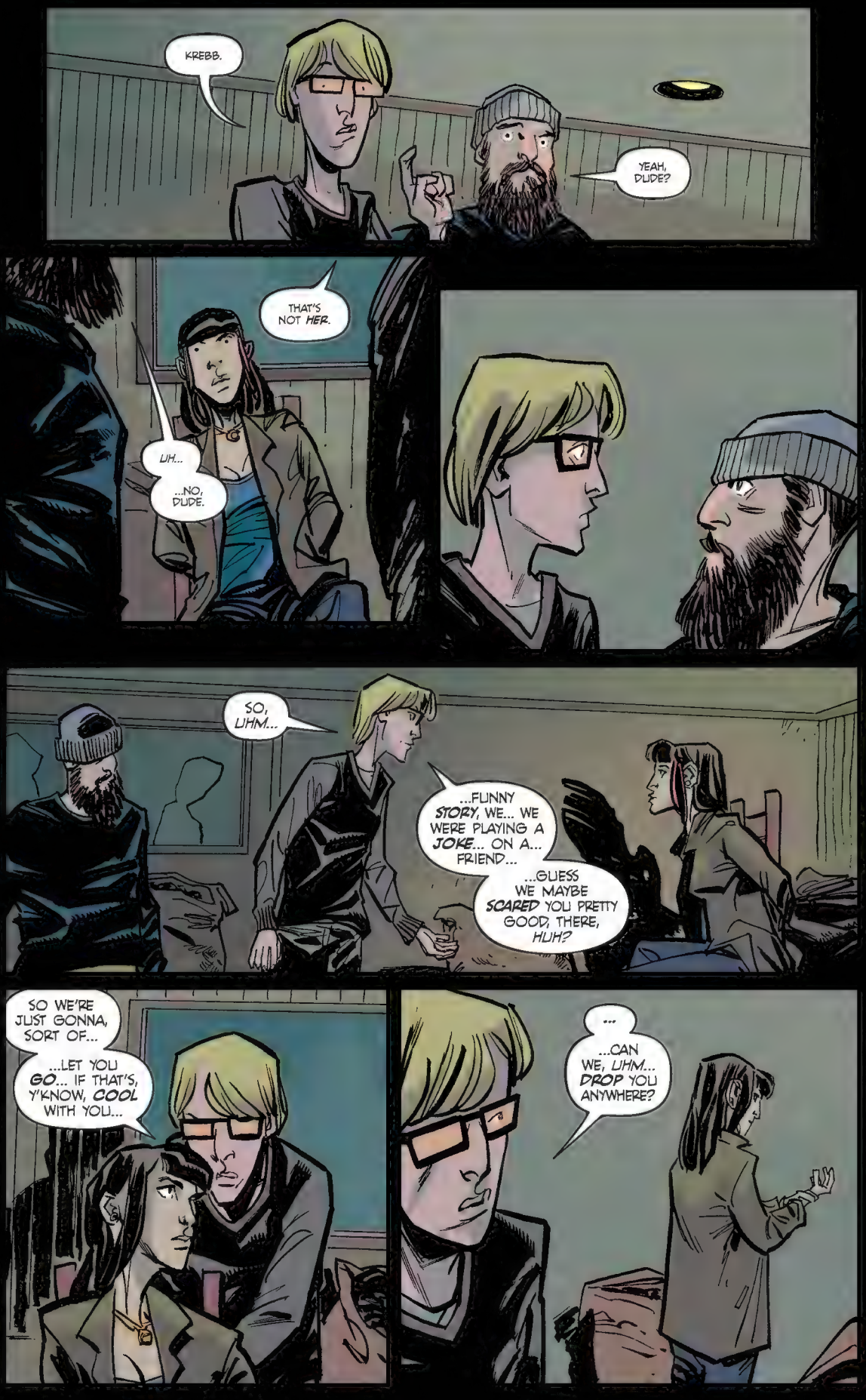
"CLEAN THIS UP."
YES, MA'AM, CAPTAIN PARIOS, MA'AM!
FUCK YOU, DEX.
FUCK. YOU.
TREATING ME LIKE *I'M* A CHILD...
...NOT GOING TO *STAY* WHERE I'M *NOT* WELCOME...

SHIT.

HEY, GREY. YOU BELIEVE IT? DEX KICKED ME OUT...
...NO... HUH...
GREY, CAN I SLEEP ON YOUR COUCH? DEX KINDA MADE IT CLEAR I WASN'T WELCOME...
...YEAH, BETTER, OKAY...
...HERE WE GO--
HEY--!
YOU DID THIS TO YOURSELF, PARIOS!
HOLD ONTO HER, KREBB!
DUDE! STOP KICKING!
LET ME GO! LET ME GO!
GET HER IN THE BACK, QUICK!
BET YOU DIDN'T THINK WE'D BE SMART ENOUGH TO MAKE AN EXTRA SET OF KEYS, HUH?
HELP! HELP!! SOMEONE--

HELP, DEX, HELP--
TUNK
UNNHH...
UH... DUDE?
I THINK MAYBE--
JUST HOLD ON!

WHAT A BEAN
UNNHH...
GOOD THING WE'RE NICE GUYS, PARIOS...
...NOT THE KIND WHO, SAY, TAKE YOUR CLOTHES AND LEAVE YOU LYING IN THE RAIN.
LIKE THAT.
BUT YOU HAD TO PLAY ROUGH, YOU HAD TO PUSH US...
...AND WHEN YOU PUSH THE BARISTA MAFIA--
OREGON
141 ZIP
--WE GRIND YOU ULTRA FINE!


KREBB.
YEAH, DUDE?
THAT'S NOT *HER*.
UH...
...NO, DUDE.
SO, UHM...
...FUNNY ***STORY***, WE... WE WERE PLAYING A ***JOKE***... ON A... FRIEND...
...GUESS WE MAYBE ***SCARED*** YOU PRETTY GOOD, THERE, *HUH?*
SO WE'RE JUST GONNA, SORT OF...
...LET YOU ***GO***... IF THAT'S, Y'KNOW, ***COOL*** WITH YOU...
...
...CAN WE, *UHM*... ***DROP*** YOU ANYWHERE?

LOOK, MISS, WE'RE... WE'RE REALLY SORRY...
...IT WAS A MISUNDERSTANDING, THAT'S ALL... YOU WON'T... TELL ANYONE...
WELL, THAT DEPENDS.
I SHOULD PROBABLY CALL THE COPS OR--
NO! YOU DON'T--I MEAN, THERE'S NO NEED TO--YOU DON'T NEED TO DO THAT!
I'M STILL DECIDING.
IT WOULD HELP ME DECIDE IF YOU TOLD ME MORE ABOUT THE COFFEE BEANS...

FUJI?
MORNING, ANSEL.
M-M-GOOD MORNING, DEX!
FUJI UP?
SHE'S-- MHFF--N-NOT HERE...
...TH-THINK SHE-- CRNNCH--WENT OUT--MFF.
OUT?
OH FOR FUCK'S SAKE...

I'LL BE RIGHT BACK, ANSEL.
GOTTA GO TALK TO GREY.
'KAY!
WHAT'D YOU TELL HIM, FUJ?
"OH, GREY, YOU'RE SO HANDSOME AND MY SISTER'S SUCH A BITCH...
"...SHE'S SO MEAN SHE KICKED ME OUT..."
DAMMIT.
DAMMIT DAMMIT DAMM--

ZZZAAAKKKKK
I FEEL I SHOULD THANK YOU FOR YOUR ADVICE, MISS PARIOS...
NH HNNN NHHH...
...THE DEVICE IS MUCH MORE EFFECTIVE WHEN EMPLOYED AS YOU SUGGESTED.
HNN GNN HNGH...
HNN NH D-DON'TNHH...

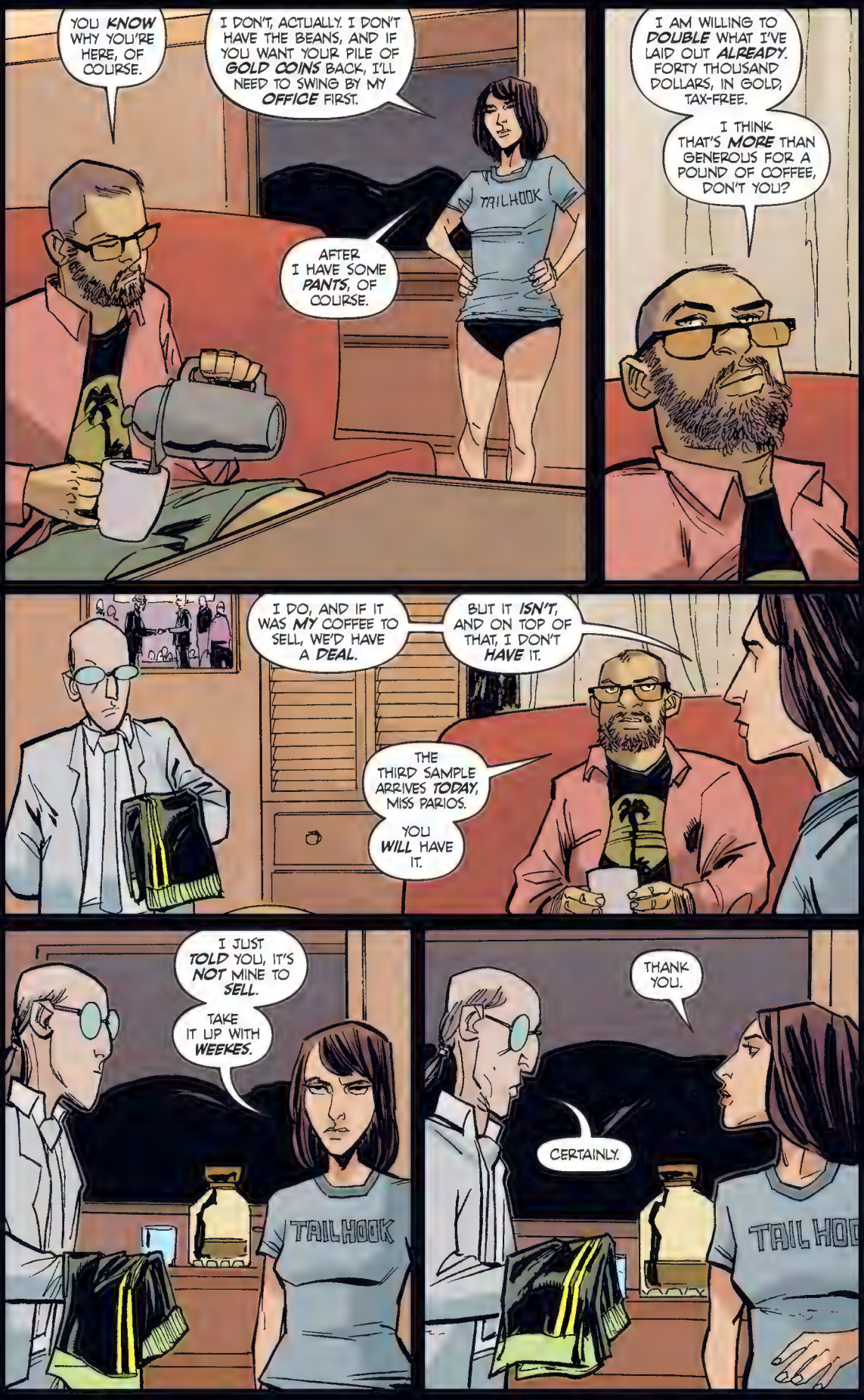
Chapter Four

DOOM O's
D-DEX, I'MMA D-DONE.
DEX?
DOOM O's
DEX?

LA TORTUGA
I REPLACED THE BATTERIES.
JUST IN CASE.
PLEASE GET OUT.

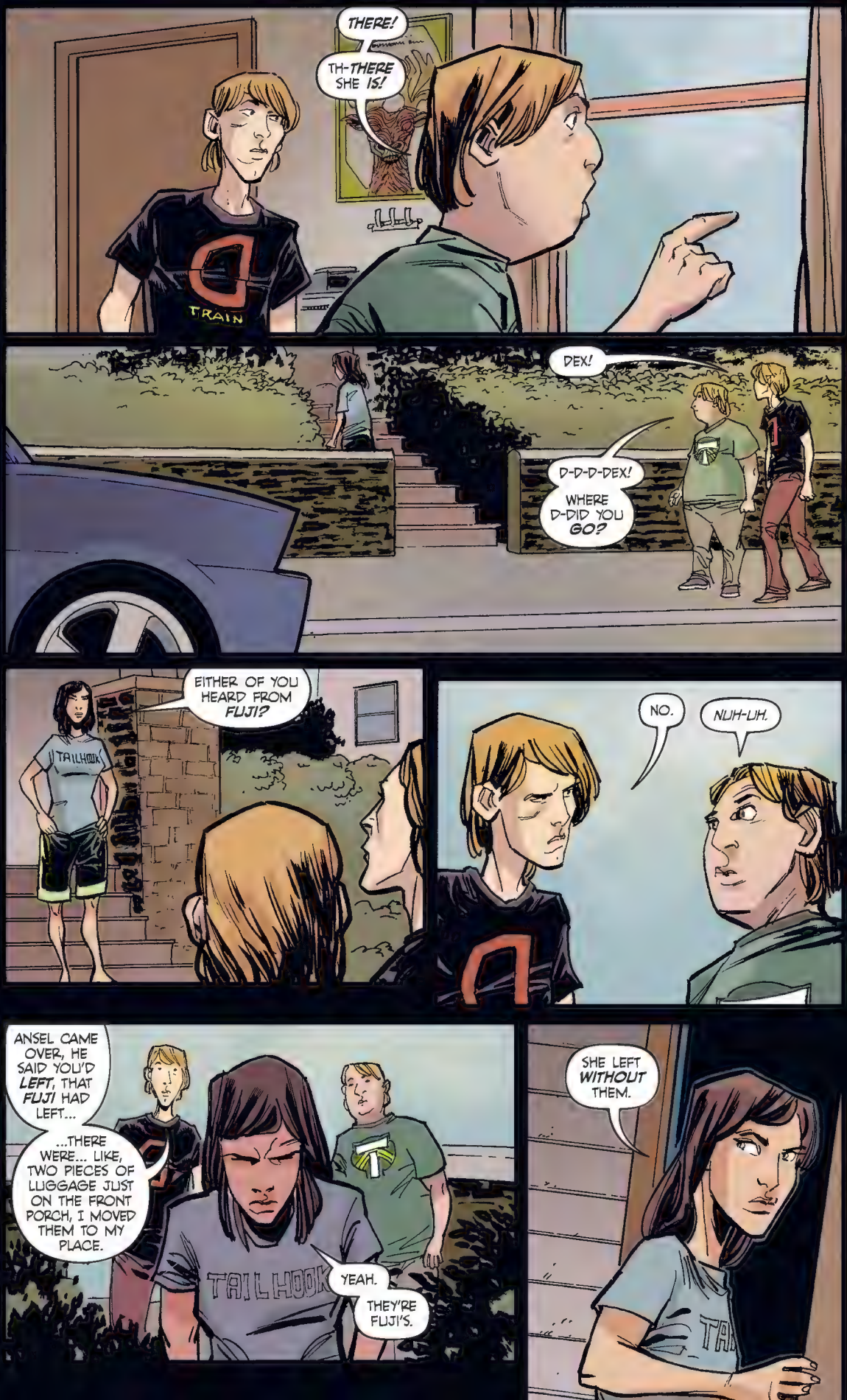
GOLDEN
KEY

YOU MUST BE MISTER LAIDLAW.
I SUPPOSE I *MUST*.
YOU ARE WITHOUT YOUR PANTS, MISS PARIOS. HAVE YOU *MISLAID* THEM?
NO, I KNOW *PRECISELY* WHERE THEY *ARE*.
YOUR GUY, DOVE, IS GUILTY OF *KIDNAPPING*, BY THE WAY...
...AND IF YOU'RE *PAYING* HIM, THAT MEANS YOU ARE, *TOO*.
DOVE, GET HER SOMETHING TO *WEAR*, WOULD YOU?
GOOD HELP IS *SO* HARD TO FIND.
WOULD YOU LIKE SOME *COFFEE*?
YOU'RE *JOKING*, RIGHT?
PERHAPS.

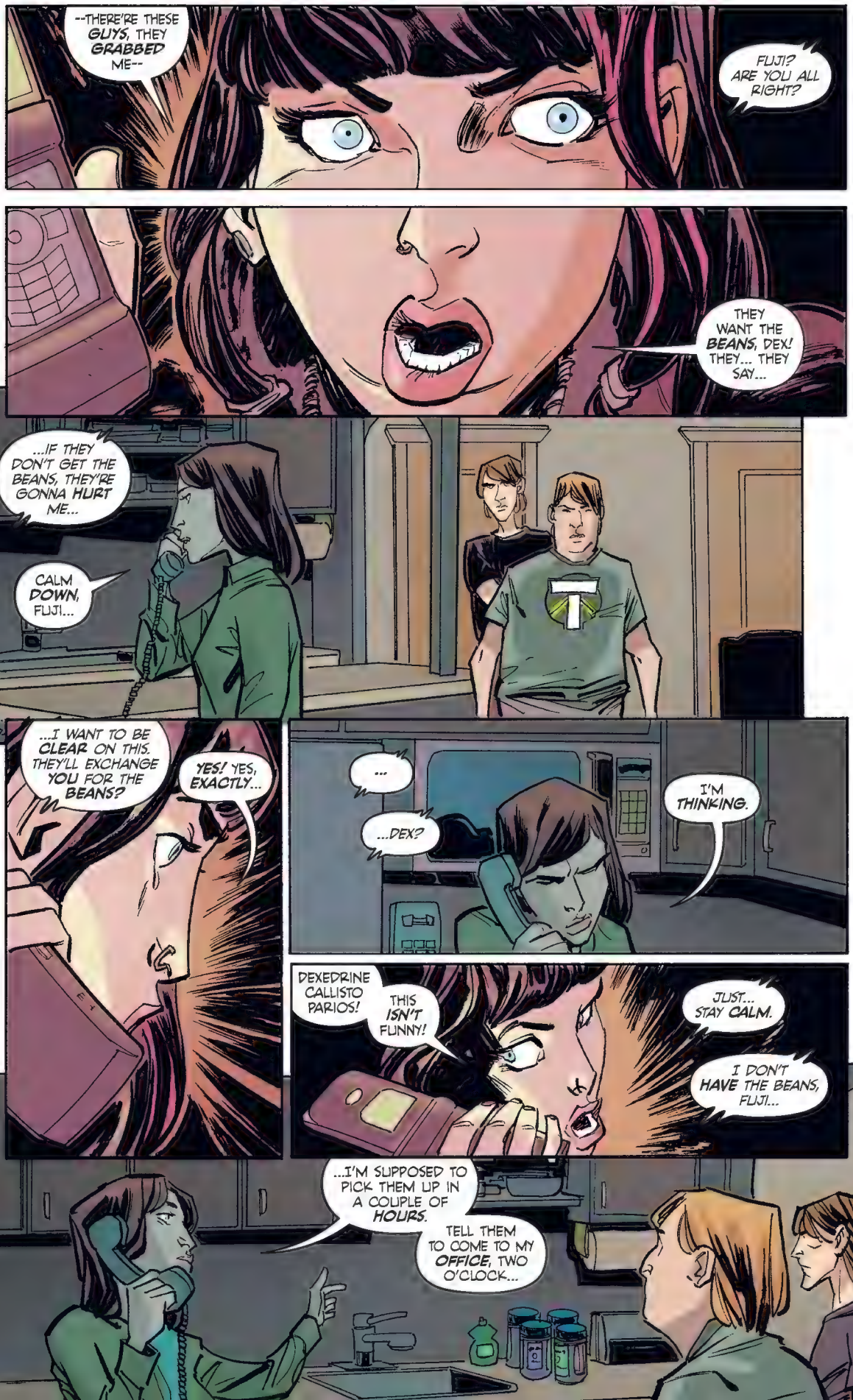

YOU KNOW WHY YOU'RE HERE, OF COURSE.
I DON'T, ACTUALLY. I DON'T HAVE THE BEANS, AND IF YOU WANT YOUR PILE OF GOLD COINS BACK, I'LL NEED TO SWING BY MY OFFICE FIRST.
AFTER I HAVE SOME PANTS, OF COURSE.
TAILHOOK
I AM WILLING TO DOUBLE WHAT I'VE LAID OUT ALREADY. FORTY THOUSAND DOLLARS, IN GOLD; TAX-FREE.
I THINK THAT'S MORE THAN GENEROUS FOR A POUND OF COFFEE, DON'T YOU?
I DO, AND IF IT WAS MY COFFEE TO SELL, WE'D HAVE A DEAL.
BUT IT ISN'T, AND ON TOP OF THAT, I DON'T HAVE IT.
THE THIRD SAMPLE ARRIVES TODAY, MISS PARIOS.
YOU WILL HAVE IT.
I JUST TOLD YOU, IT'S NOT MINE TO SELL.
TAKE IT UP WITH WEEKES.
TAILHOOK
THANK YOU.
CERTAINLY.
TAIL HOO

WAIT--
--WAIT WAIT
WAIT WAIT
WAIT--
--*WAIT!!*
WHERE'S
FUJI?
WHO?

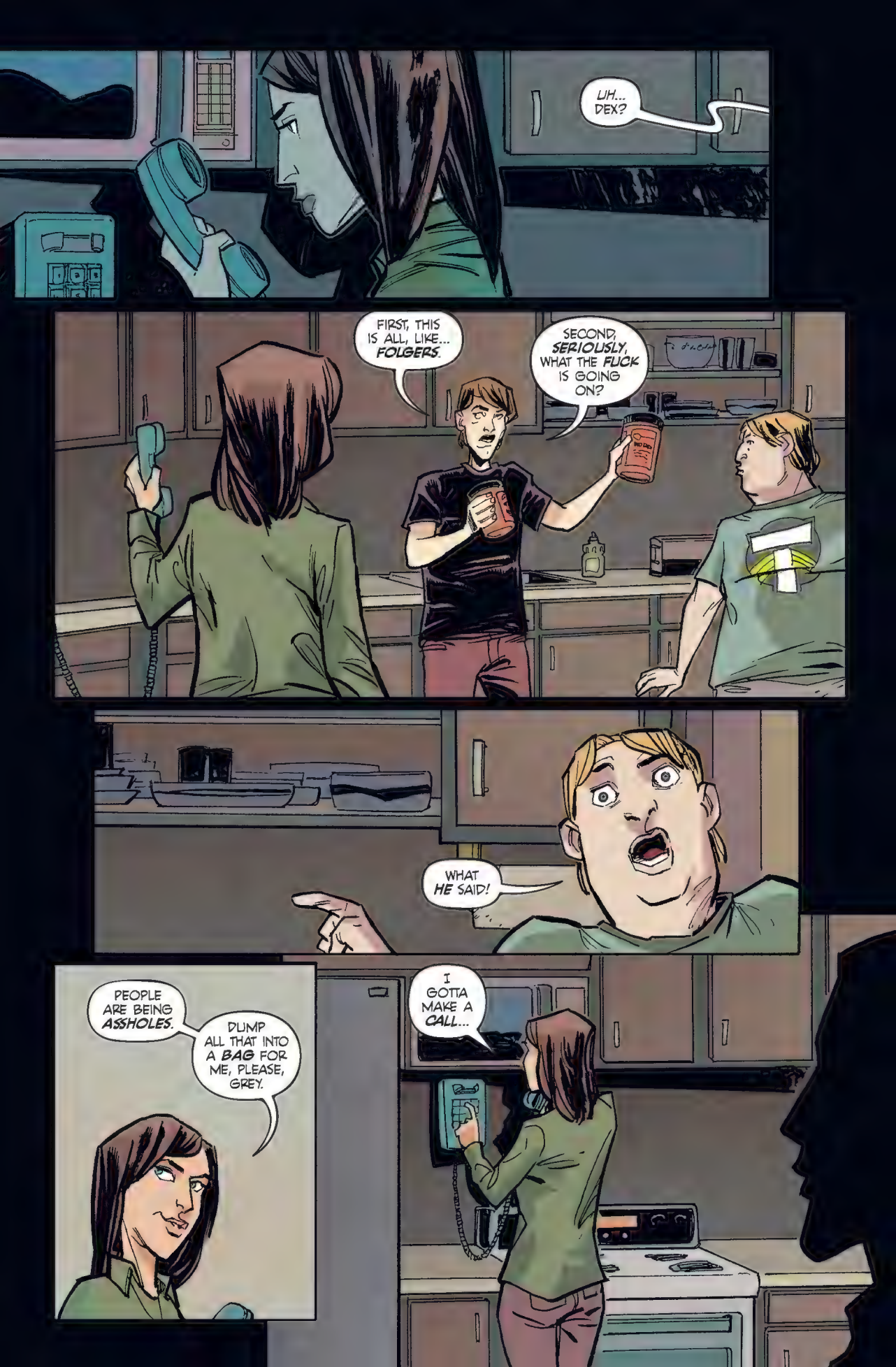
SHIT.
PARIOS--
YOU REALLY NEED TO SHUT THE FUCK UP, MAN.
--WE CAN COME TO AN AGREEMENT--
--THERE MUST BE SOMETHING YOU WANT?
I COULD HIRE YOU...
...YOU'RE CLEARLY FAR MORE QUALIFIED AT THIS SORT OF WORK THAN MISTER DOVE!
CERTAINLY WE CAN COME TO SOME SORT OF AN ARRANGEMENT?
IT'S ONLY COFFEE, MISS PARIOS.
EXACTLY.

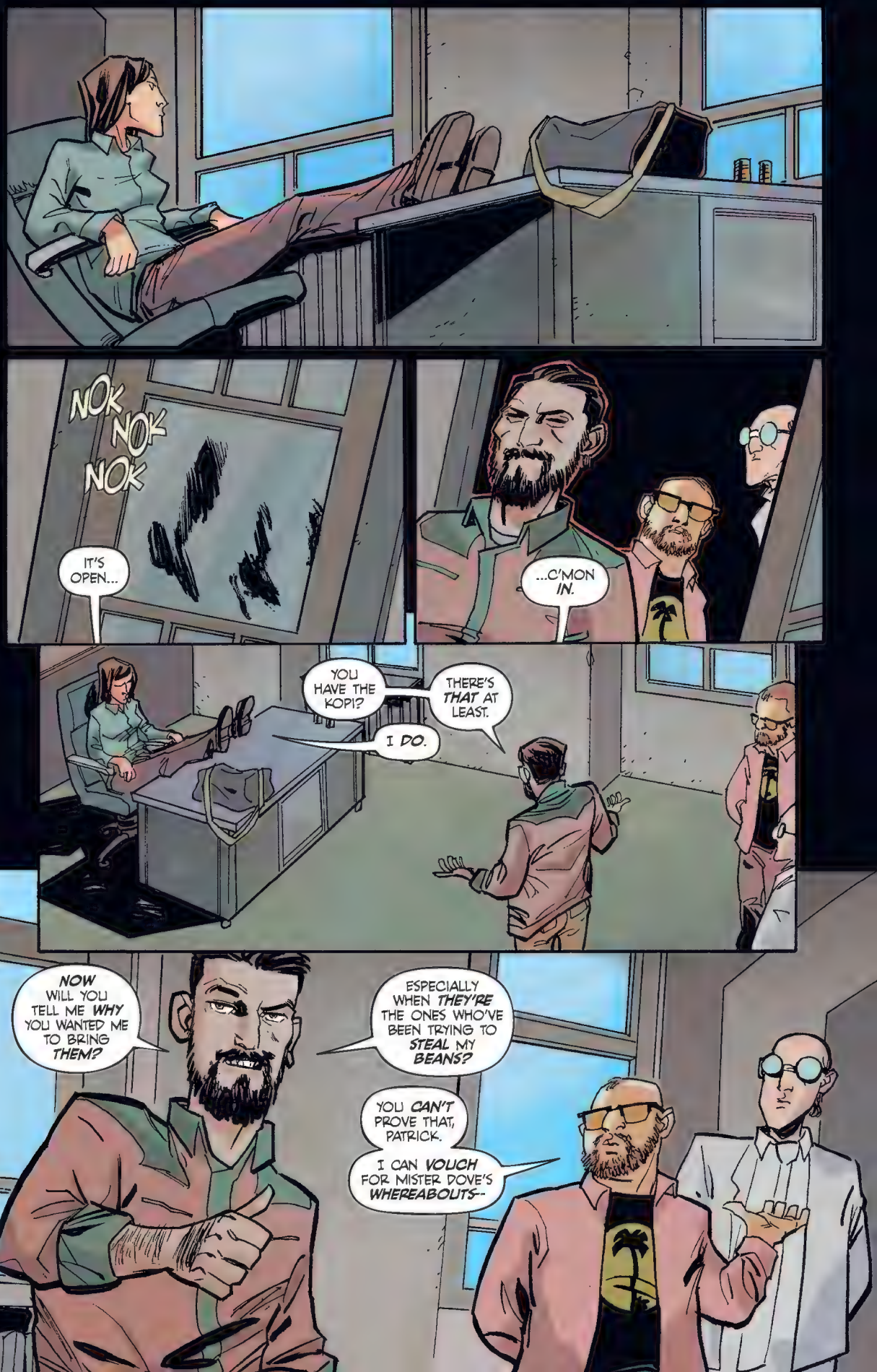

THERE!
TH-THERE SHE IS!
TRAIN
DEX!
D-D-D-DEX! WHERE D-DID YOU GO?
EITHER OF YOU HEARD FROM FUJI?
TAILHOOK
NO.
NUH-UH.
ANSEL CAME OVER, HE SAID YOU'D LEFT, THAT FUJI HAD LEFT...
...THERE WERE... LIKE, TWO PIECES OF LUGGAGE JUST ON THE FRONT PORCH, I MOVED THEM TO MY PLACE.
TAILHOOK
YEAH.
THEY'RE FUJI'S.
SHE LEFT WITHOUT THEM.

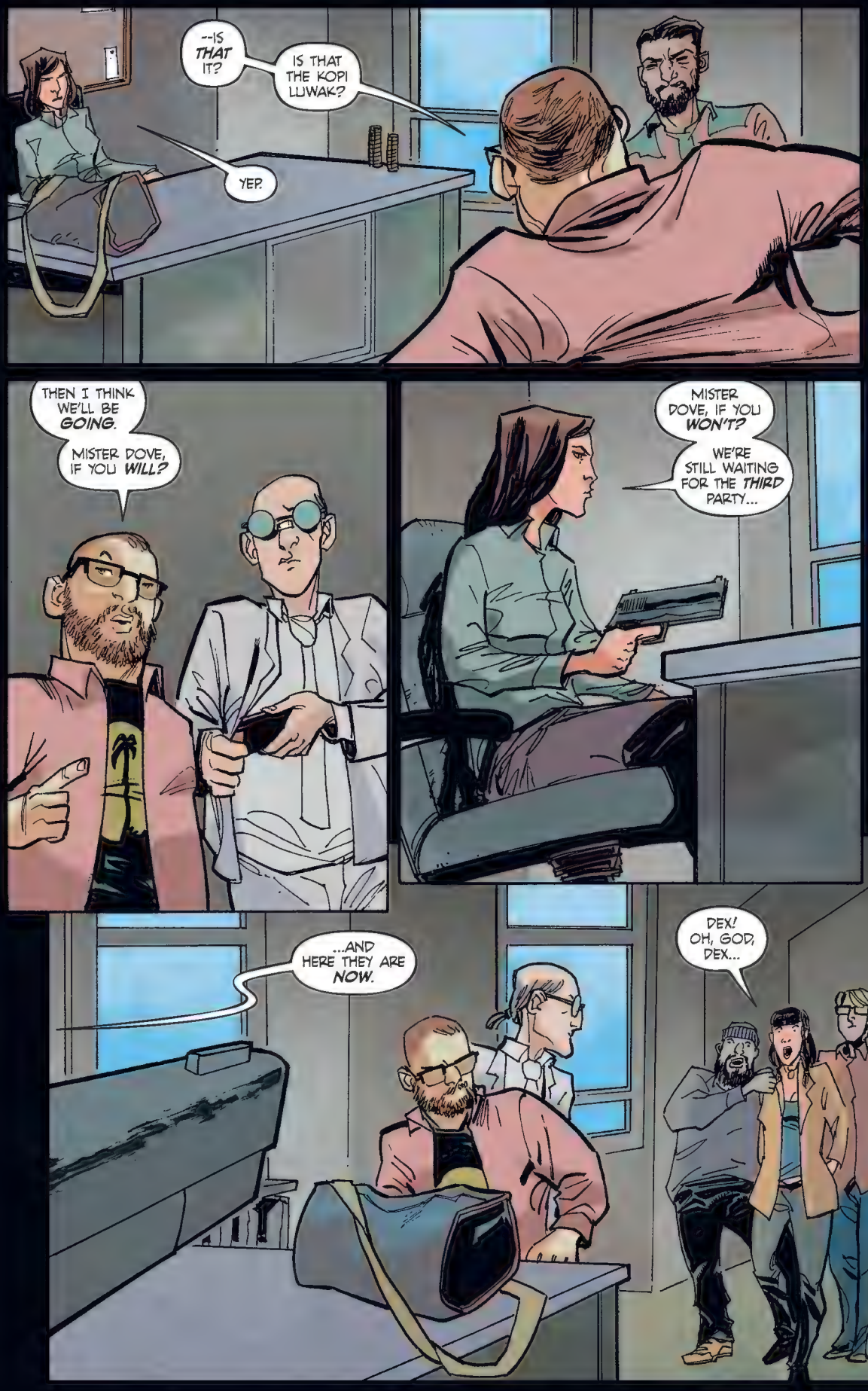
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "LEFT WITHOUT THEM?"
YEAH, DOESN'T MAKE MUCH SENSE, DOES IT?
SHE'D NEVER LEAVE HER PRECIOUS CLOTHES BEHIND.
BE RIGHT BACK.
BREET BREET
I'M GONNA NEED YOU TO WATCH ANSEL FOR ME, GREY.
BREET BREET
WHAT? WHAT'S GOING ON?
PARIOS.
DEX? OH MY GOD, DEX--


--THERE'RE THESE GUYS, THEY GRABBED ME--
FUJI!? ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
THEY WANT THE BEANS, DEX! THEY... THEY SAY...
...IF THEY DON'T GET THE BEANS, THEY'RE GONNA HURT ME...
CALM DOWN, FUJI...
...I WANT TO BE CLEAR ON THIS. THEY'LL EXCHANGE YOU FOR THE BEANS?
YES! YES, EXACTLY...
...
...DEX?
I'M THINKING.
DEXEDRINE CALLISTO PARIOS!
THIS ISN'T FUNNY!
JUST... STAY CALM.
I DON'T HAVE THE BEANS, FUJI...
...I'M SUPPOSED TO PICK THEM UP IN A COUPLE OF HOURS.
TELL THEM TO COME TO MY OFFICE, TWO O'CLOCK...

...WE'LL MAKE THE SWAP THEN.
I WILL, I'LL TELL THEM.
THANK YOU, DEX, THANK--
--AH, LET GO OF ME, LET GO--
--DEX!!
HER OFFICE, TWO O'CLOCK.
SHE'LL SWAP ME FOR THE BEANS.
ONCE WE'RE ALL OUT OF THERE, I'LL MEET YOU BACK HERE FOR MY HALF.
YOU GOT ANYTHING TO DRINK AROUND HERE THAT ISN'T COFFEE?
DUDE.
TOTALLY.


UH... DEX?
FIRST, THIS IS ALL, LIKE... FOLGERS.
SECOND, SERIOUSLY, WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON?
WHAT HE SAID!
PEOPLE ARE BEING ASSHOLES.
DUMP ALL THAT INTO A BAG FOR ME, PLEASE, GREY.
I GOTTA MAKE A CALL...


NOK NOK NOK
IT'S OPEN...
...C'MON IN.
YOU HAVE THE KOPI?
I DO.
THERE'S THAT AT LEAST.
NOW WILL YOU TELL ME WHY YOU WANTED ME TO BRING THEM?
ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY'RE THE ONES WHO'VE BEEN TRYING TO STEAL MY BEANS?
YOU CAN'T PROVE THAT, PATRICK.
I CAN VOUCH FOR MISTER DOVE'S WHEREABOUTS--


--IS THAT IT?
IS THAT THE KOPI LUWAK?
YEP.
THEN I THINK WE'LL BE GOING.
MISTER DOVE, IF YOU WILL?
MISTER DOVE, IF YOU WON'T?
WE'RE STILL WAITING FOR THE THIRD PARTY...
...AND HERE THEY ARE NOW.
DEX! OH, GOD, DEX...

...UHM...
...WHO ARE THEY?
YOU!
I SHOULD'VE KNOWN IT WOULD BE YOU TWO BEHIND THE "BARISTA MAFIA!"
UH... HI, MISTER WEEKES.
DUDE.
I SHOULD'VE SEEN THAT COMING.
WANT TO EXPLAIN HOW YOU KNOW THESE GUYS, PATRICK?
THIS IS BRIAN BRADY AND LIAM KREBB, DEX.
FORMER BARISTAS AT SIP'S STOREFRONT...
...BEFORE I FIRED THEM FOR SELLING THEIR OWN ROASTS UNDER THE COUNTER...
...CINNAMON INFUSED KONA AND VANILLA-SCENTED GARUDA AND GARBAGE LIKE THAT!

ENHANCING BEANS WITH AROMATICS IS NOT A CRIME, IT'S--
IT'S A BASTARDIZATION OF COFFEE! MY GOD, IS THAT WHAT YOU HAD PLANNED FOR MY KOPI?
TURNING THE FINEST COFFEE IN THE WORLD INTO A STARBUCKS FRAPPUCINO-OF-THE-WEEK?
YOU...
...BASTARDS.
THERE'S THE PART WHERE THEY KIDNAPPED MY SISTER, TOO.
IF WE'RE LOOKING FOR THINGS TO ACTUALLY BE OUTRAGED ABOUT.
YOU OKAY?
FINE.
JUST WAS A LITTLE SCARED IS ALL.
I CAN IMAGINE.
THIS IS ALL VERY INTERESTING...
...AND HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ME, SO IF YOU DON'T MIND...

...I'LL JUST *COLLECT* WHAT I'VE *PAID FOR* AND MISTER DOVE AND I WILL BE *GOING*.

IT'S *COFFEE*, LAIDLAW.

ARE YOU *REALLY* GOING TO SHOOT MY SISTER IN THE *HEAD* OVER *COFFEE*?

IT'S NOT ABOUT THE *COFFEE*, MISS PARIOS.

IT'S ABOUT ME GETTING WHAT I *WANT*.

YOU *WON'T* DO IT.

I WON'T? *WHY* NOT?

BECAUSE I DON'T CARE *HOW* RICH YOU ARE, YOU'LL BE COMMITTING *MURDER* IN FRONT OF *FOUR* WITNESSES.

AND PRECISELY *BECAUSE* OF HOW RICH I *AM*, I'LL GET *AWAY* WITH IT.

DEX.

I'M *THINKING*.

DEXEDRINE CALLISTO!

SHIT.

FINE.
TAKE IT AND GET OUT.
WHAT? NO!
YOU CAN KEEP THE MONEY, PARIOS.
CONSIDER IT PAYMENT FOR SERVICES RENDERED.
SO.
I, UH...
...I GUESS WE'LL BE GOING, TOO...?
I GUESS YOU DAMN-WELL BETTER.

ALL RIGHT, COME ON.
LET'S GET YOUR COFFEE...
...BE RIGHT BACK, FUJI.

I THOUGHT I DID PRETTY WELL...
...I MEAN, I WAS PRETTY CONVINCING, WASN'T I?
LAIDLAW BOUGHT IT AND EVERYTHING?
AT LEAST UNTIL HE TASTES WHAT HE GOT, YEAH.
YOU USED THE COFFEE FROM THESE CONTAINERS, RIGHT?
YOU JUST SWITCHED THEM?
NAH, COULDN'T. THE STUFF IN THOSE CONTAINERS COMES PRE-GROUND.
I USED STARBUCKS.
AHH HAHAH HAHAHA HAH!!
FANTASTIC!
SEE YOU AROUND, PARIOS!

--DO YOU MEAN, YOU CAN'T TAKE THIS--
--IT'S GOLD, YOU'VE GOT TO BE ABLE TO TAKE GOLD!
LADY, THE COUNTRY WENT OFF THE GOLD STANDARD IN 1971.
I'LL COVER IT, WALLY...
...SHE'S FAMILY.
WITH THAT KIND OF TACT, I'D NEVER HAVE GUESSED.
ONE-WAY TO SEATTLE.
THANK YOU FOR CHOOSING AMTRAK.

I'M **NOT** GIVING IT **BACK**, DON'T EVEN **ASK**.

I **NEED** THE MONEY **MORE** THAN YOU, OKAY?

OKAY.

I HATE BEING PREDICTABLE.

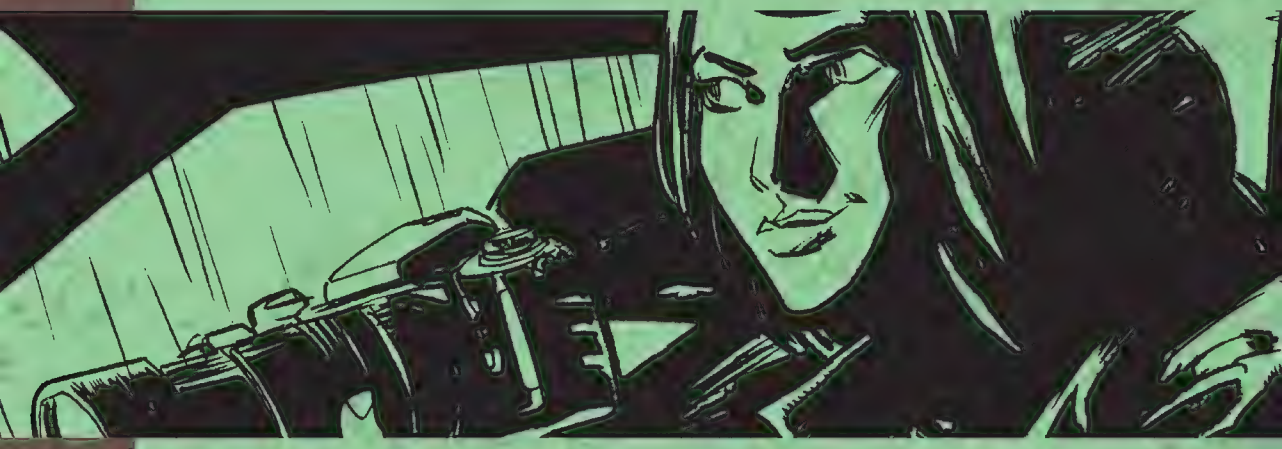
HEY, FUJI.

WHAT?

NEXT TIME YOU THINK ABOUT COMING TO **VISIT** ME?

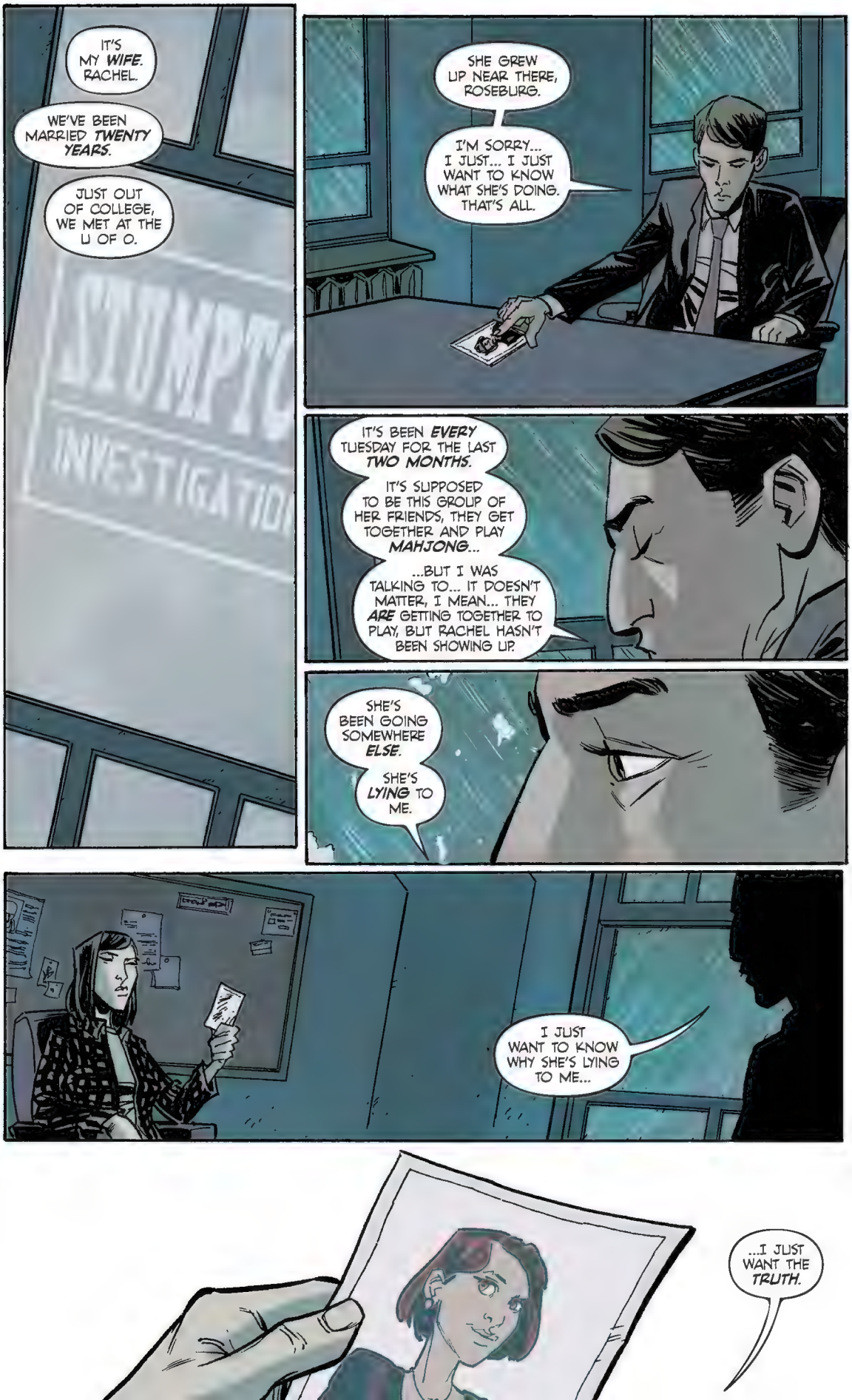
DON'T.

GIVE MY LOVE TO ANSEL, DEX.



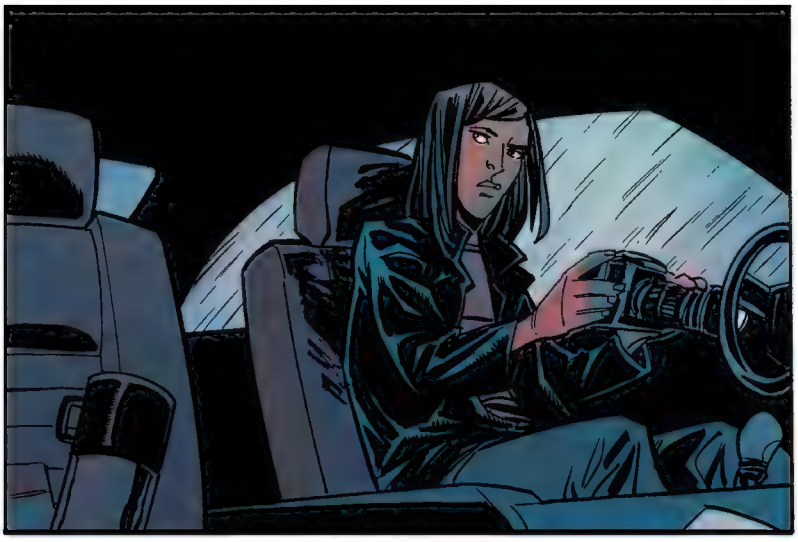
Chapter Five

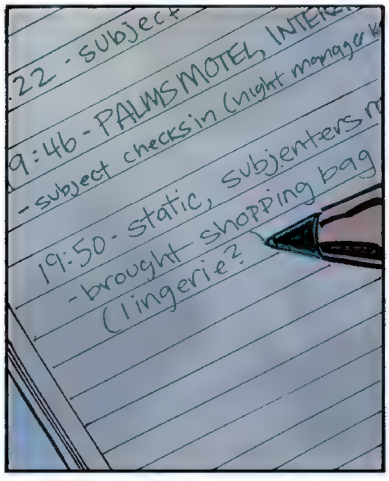
The Case of the Night That Wouldn't End

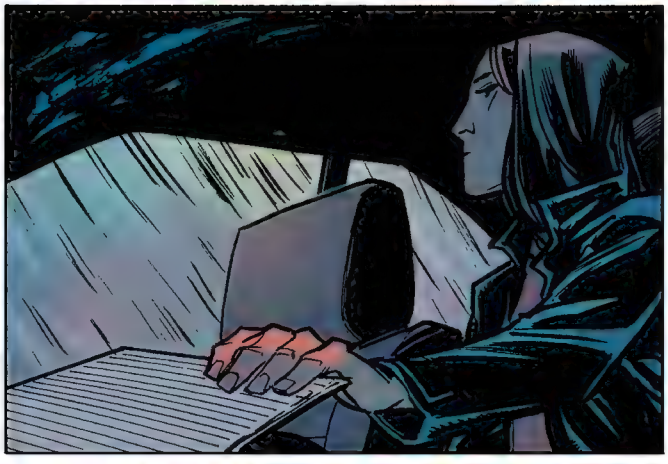

IT'S MY WIFE. RACHEL.
WE'VE BEEN MARRIED TWENTY YEARS.
JUST OUT OF COLLEGE, WE MET AT THE U OF O.
SHE GREW UP NEAR THERE, ROSEBURG.
I'M SORRY... I JUST... I JUST WANT TO KNOW WHAT SHE'S DOING. THAT'S ALL.
IT'S BEEN EVERY TUESDAY FOR THE LAST TWO MONTHS.
IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE THIS GROUP OF HER FRIENDS, THEY GET TOGETHER AND PLAY MAHJONG...
...BUT I WAS TALKING TO... IT DOESN'T MATTER, I MEAN... THEY ARE GETTING TOGETHER TO PLAY, BUT RACHEL HASN'T BEEN SHOWING UP.
SHE'S BEEN GOING SOMEWHERE ELSE.
SHE'S LYING TO ME.
I JUST WANT TO KNOW WHY SHE'S LYING TO ME...
...I JUST WANT THE TRUTH.

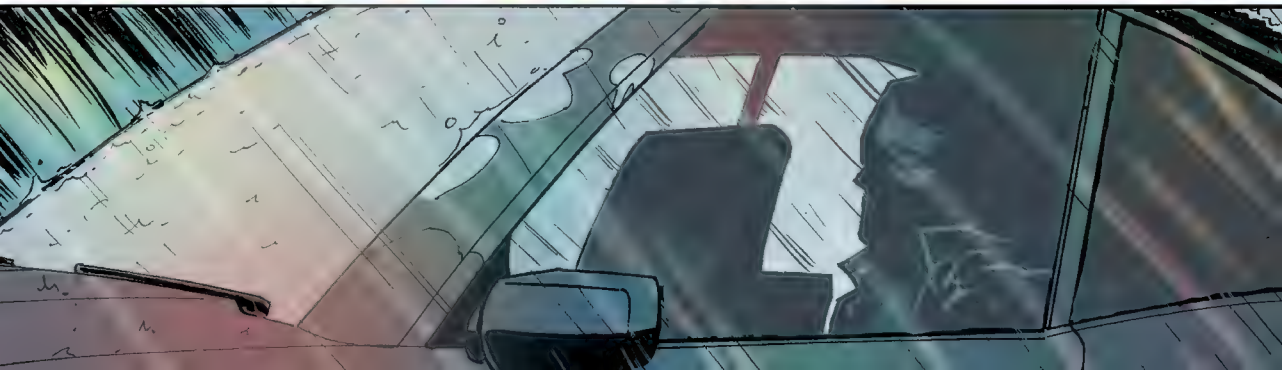
OPEN
19:46
Tuesday, November 8

KLK
KLK
KLK
KLK
KLK
KLK




22 - subject
9:46 - PALMS MOTEL, INTER
- subject checks in (night manager
19:50 - static, subject enters
- brought shopping bag
(lingerie?





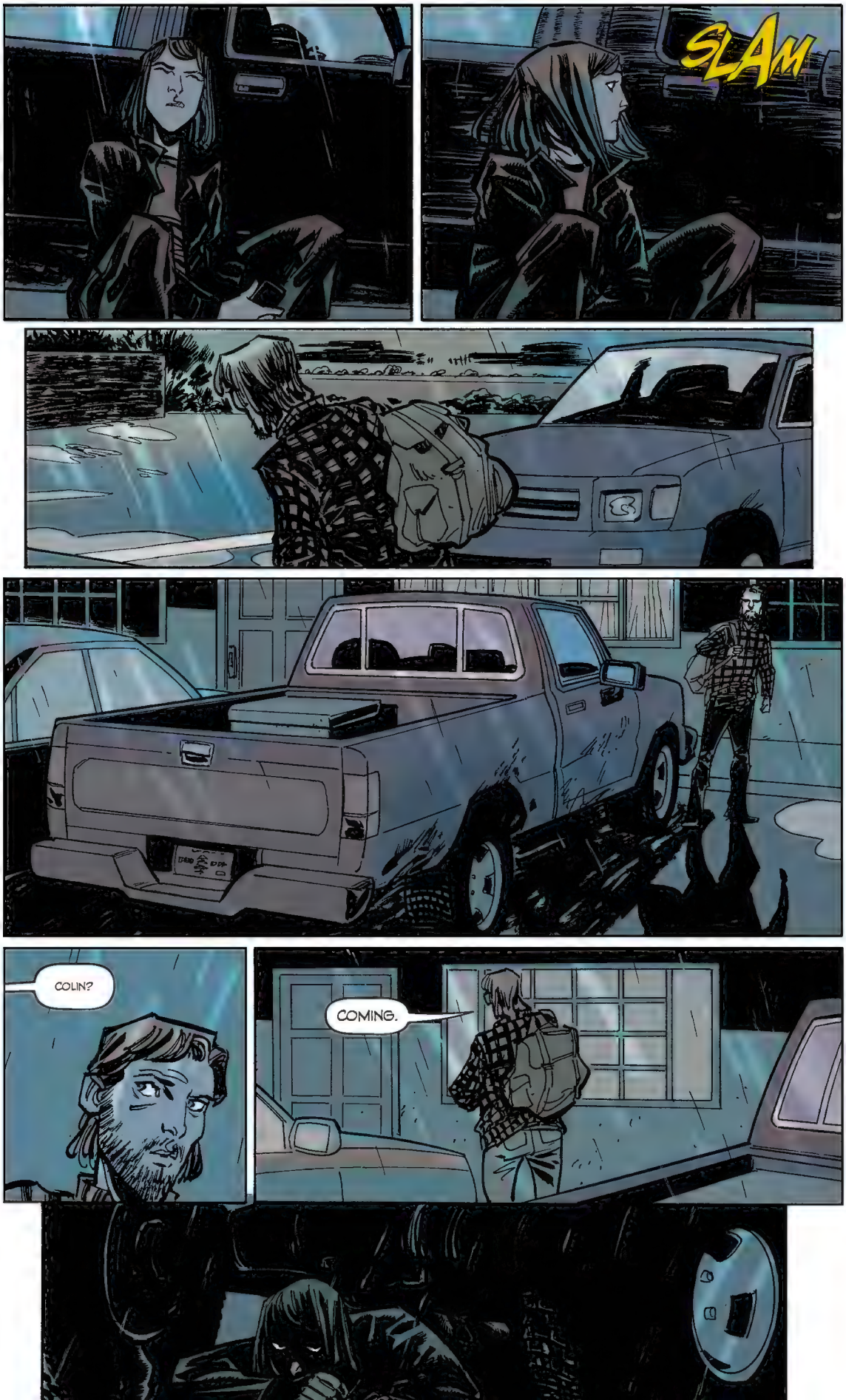
DING DING
19:46
Tuesday, November 8
Jimmy,
You forgot, didn't you?

KLK
KLK
KLK
KLK
KLK
KLK

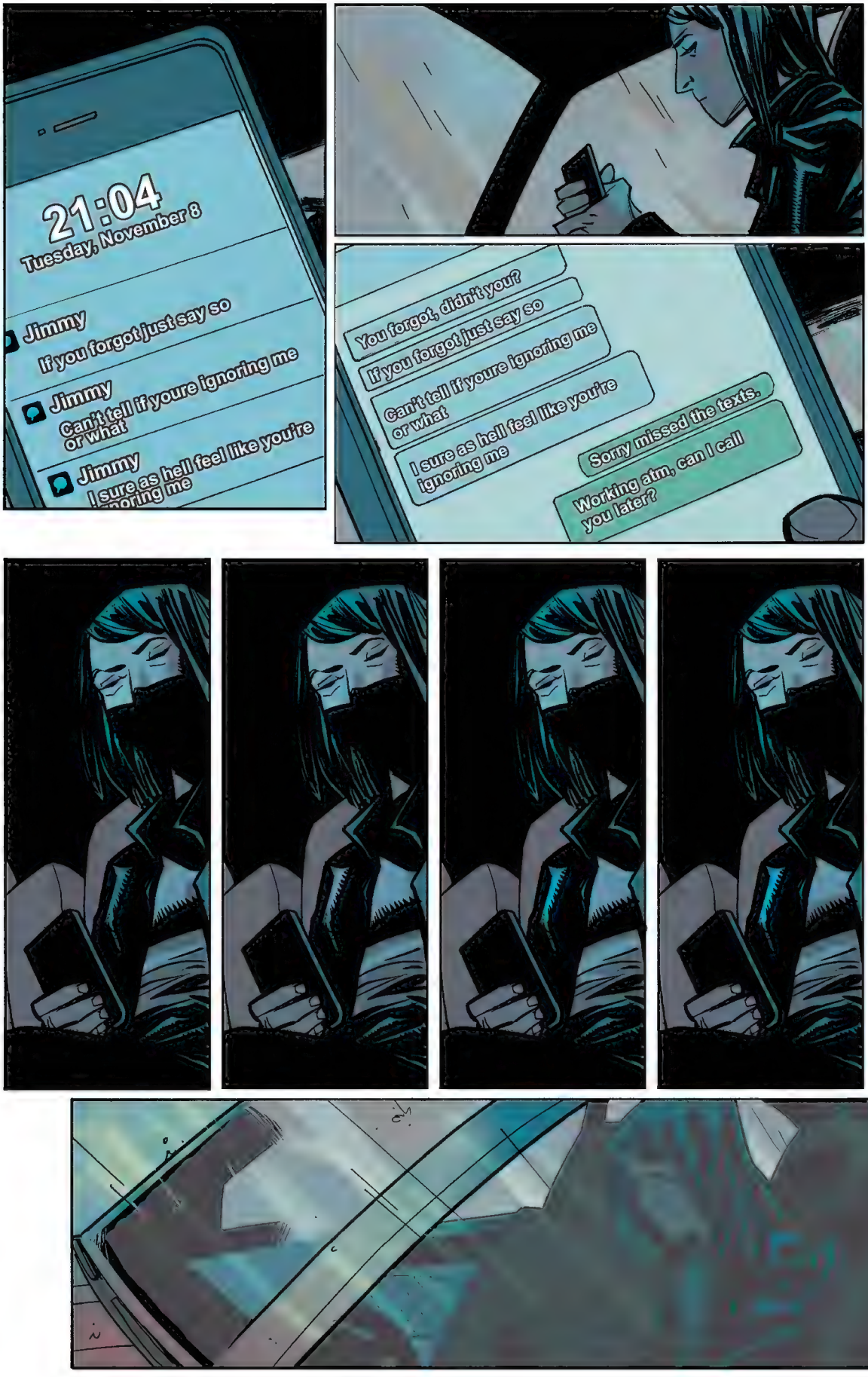
OPEN

2011

SNIFF
SNIFF
DING
DING


SLAM
COLIN?
COMING.

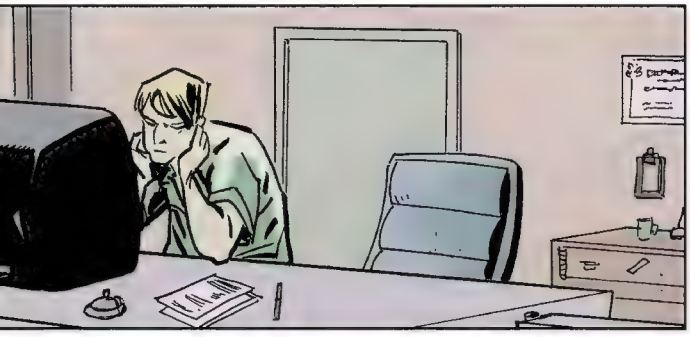
DING
DING

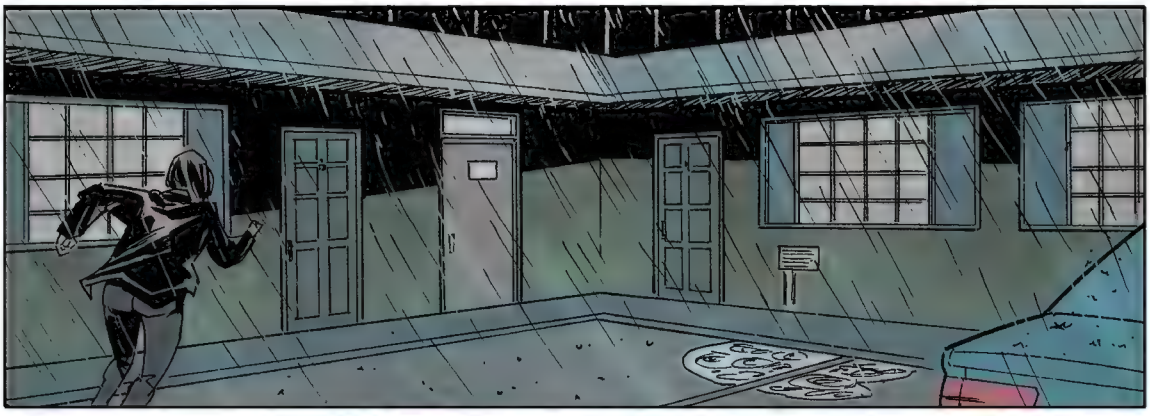

21:04
Tuesday, November 8
Jimmy
If you forgot just say so
Jimmy
Can't tell if youre ignoring me or what
Jimmy
I sure as hell feel like you're ignoring me
You forgot, didn't you?
If you forgot just say so
Can't tell if youre ignoring me or what
I sure as hell feel like you're ignoring me
Sorry missed the texts.
Working atm, can I call you later?

HOTEL
COMMERCIAL
CATES
FREE HBO
FREE
WIRELESS
INTERNET
7
KLK
KLK
KLK
KLK

KLK
KLK
KLK
KLK
KLK
21:19
Tuesday, November

21:27
Tuesday, November 8
KLK
KLK
KLK
KLK
Jimmy
Nothing to talk about





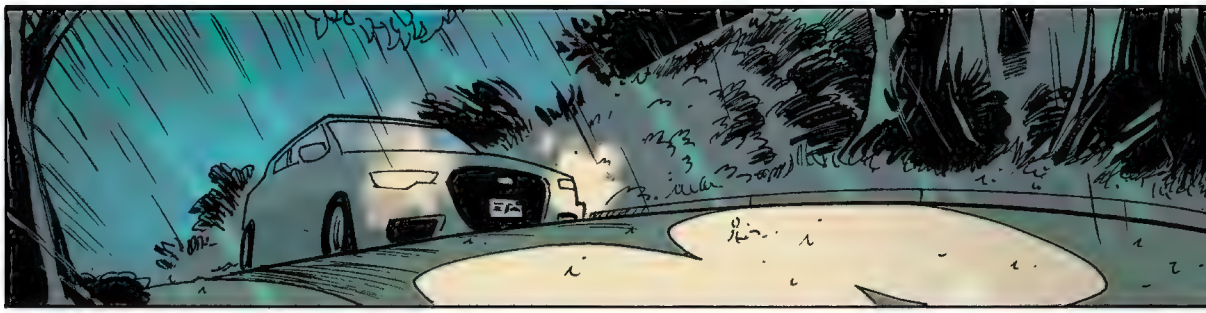
LAUNDRY

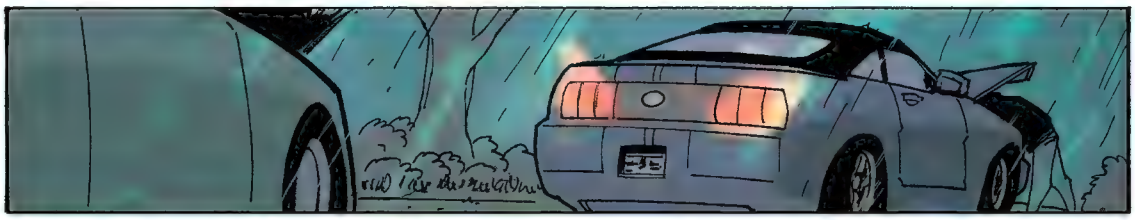
21:36
Tuesday, November 8
Jimmy
Nothing to talk about. It's been fun, Dex.
Jimmy
Maybe I'll see you aroun sometimes. Cheers.

CHK
IT'S NOT MY STUFF, MAN.
I DON'T KNOW WHERE IT CAME FROM.

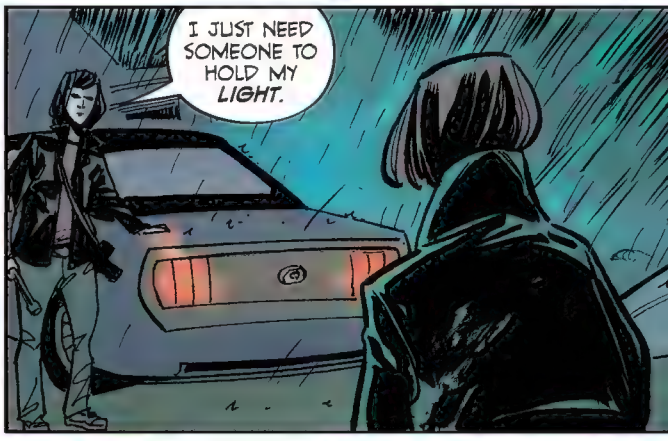
INTERNET
FREE WIFI
FREE
WIRELESS
INTERNET

22:20
Tuesday, November 8





CAN YOU GIVE ME A HAND?


I JUST NEED SOMEONE TO HOLD MY *LIGHT*.

THANKS.

YOU'RE RACHEL BOWMAN?
YES, I-- DO I *KNOW* YOU?
MY NAME'S PARIOS. CAN I SHOW YOU SOMETHING?

I'M *SORRY*, I'VE GOT TO GET *HOME*, I--

IT'LL JUST TAKE A MINUTE, I PROMISE, MRS. BOWMAN.

HIS NAME IS COLIN.
OUR CHURCH VOLUNTEERS WITH DIFFERENT HOMELESS SHELTERS AROUND THE CITY.
THAT'S HOW WE FOUND EACH OTHER.
HE'S HOMELESS.
HE'S HAD SOME... DEPENDENCE ISSUES.
YOU NEED TO TELL YOUR HUSBAND, MRS. BOWMAN.
I'LL COME WITH YOU, IF YOU WANT.
I'VE BEEN LYING TO MY HUSBAND FOR TWENTY YEARS, MISS PARIOS.
IF I TELL HIM I HAVE A SON, IT'LL BREAK HIS HEART.
THERE ARE TWO KINDS OF PEOPLE WHO HIRE ME TO FIND OUT IF THEIR SPOUSE IS CHEATING ON THEM, MRS. BOWMAN.
THE ONES WHO HOPE THEY ARE, AND THE ONES WHO ARE PRAYING THEY'RE NOT.
LET'S GO ANSWER YOUR HUSBAND'S PRAYERS.

STUMPTOWN

BONUS MATERIAL

STUMPTOWN INTERVIEW

HOW HAS YOUR COLLABORATION DEVELOPED OVER "THE CASE OF A CUP OF JOE"?

GREG RUCKA: I think when we started working together, with Justin coming aboard after the rough scheduling road that Matthew and I had prior, we were certainly sounding each other out. We spoke before hopping into bed, so to speak, but the first arc, "King of Clubs," I think we were each learning to work with one another. It wasn't a painful or difficult process by any means (at least I don't think it was!), but it was certainly a learning process.

With "Cup of Joe," though—and especially with the standalone issue that rounds out this volume—we've gotten to know each other, both personally and professionally, that there's not only a shorthand developing, but a much more solid understanding of what interests each of us, what we're interested in trying to do with the narrative. A lot of the humor in "Cup of Joe" is a direct result of just getting to know Justin, getting to know his sense of humor. I don't quite know how to explain it—Justin's got a smile, and like him, it's sort of a quiet (maybe modest?) smile, and that... I kinda picture that when I'm writing. I'm putting down descriptions of motion, of action of the story, and as I'm writing I'm thinking, okay, Justin's gonna laugh at that, or, Justin's gonna love that.

I've been writing comics for a long time now, and I'm ashamed to admit that it took me far too long to understand that part of my job is to write for my collaborator as much as it is to just write the story. It's something I've been actively trying to get better at, and I think—at this point—Justin and I are working with total confidence in each other. You don't get the standalone issue without that kind of trust, honestly—and that was a story that is almost entirely born of a conversation with Justin, of talking about what he'd like to try, what story he'd like to draw.

JUSTIN GREENWOOD: That's interesting to hear you say that you only more recently feel like you learned to write for your collaborator—part of what I enjoy about your scripts so much is that they feel like a dialogue we are having, rather than flat descriptions. There's an element that is as if I'm listening to you work something out and after you are finished, I jump in and bring an interpretation that I think both serves the core idea well but also becomes something new, visually.

I don't know if I could nail down a specific development over the course this new volume but it's definitely true to say we've established a better comfort and understanding of each others' sensibilities since starting to work together a couple years ago.

Collaborations are like any other relationships when you really boil it down. You know how it is when you are first dating, right? It's new, you are extra careful to be polite, not to burp and fart around each other. It's not until you've been going steady for a while before you really feel like you have a true sense of each other without any pretense.

Or in keeping with this terrible analogy, neither of us really minds leaving the bathroom door open anymore.

You can't really know what it will be like working with someone right at the start but if you're lucky it feels very natural, even instinctual right off the bat. To Greg's credit, he really went out of his way to be open and made it clear that he wanted me to feel invested and comfortable expressing myself from the outset. Neither of us wants to be so precious about what we bring to the table that it gets in each other's way to tell a great story. So we had a pretty easy time falling into a rhythm and it's only gotten better the more we work together.

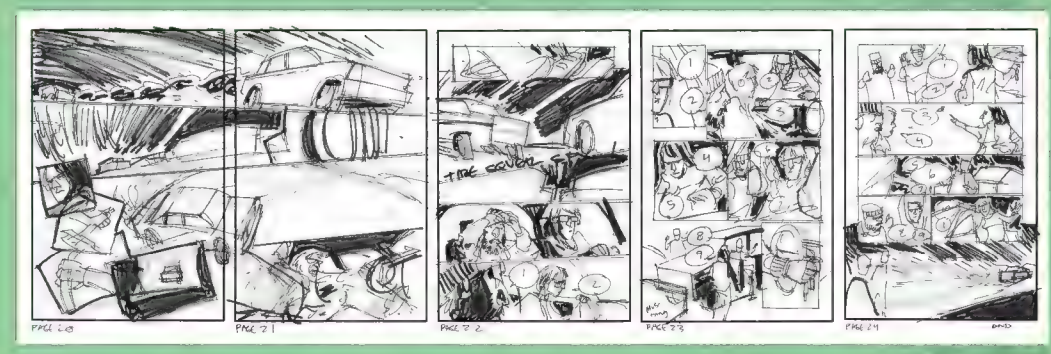
RYAN HILL: Coming in as a colorist and being the last step of the process, it's a bit easier on me because the bones of the thing are already laid out. I'm following the wonderfully forged path that Greg and Justin have made and it's my responsibility to just add that last layer of emphasis and atmosphere. That being said, if I'm doing my job right, I'm making both of them happy while also hitting my own goal, which was to make this book feel like "the right version of Portland." Portland is specific. In the mind of the country right now, and very much in the mind of the people who live here. I think the cultural iconography of the city, for a majority of people who only know it as a thought, see it as "overcast/grey/with hints underneath." Having lived here now for about 15 years, it's way, way more colorful than that. I wanted to reflect that, while still adding the right notes of "Rockford/Detective story" that are in most beats of *Stumptown*. Justin and I were able to hit a rhythm fairly easily, I felt. There are always adjustments and tweaks, but I think we hit a good stride early on and were able to carry it through all the issues we worked on together.

WHAT WAS THE PROCESS LIKE CREATING PAGES 20-24 OF CHAPTER ONE?

JG: From the first few pages of Dex sipping on the coffee, I remember feeling like the tone of this arc was something unique, very funny at times but without losing sight of the gravity of the stakes. There is a challenge in this type of storytelling that really appealed to me, seeing how far we could go with one aspect without stepping on the others.

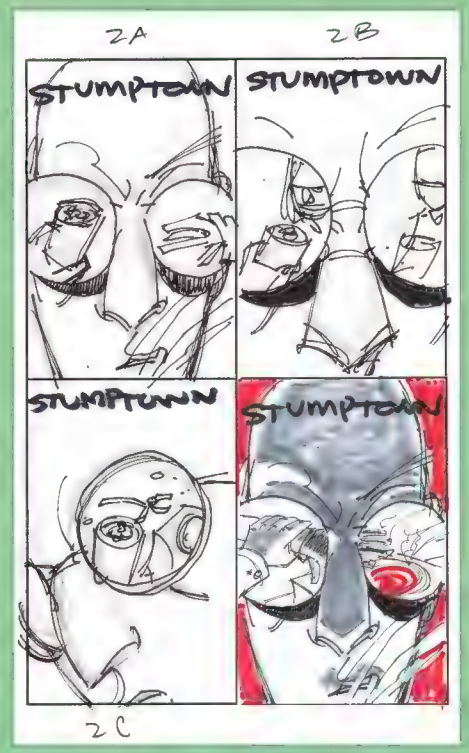
The end of that first chapter is one of the only times I could think of that Dex ends on top at the end of an issue, and the rhythm of that last sequence building up to it was big with lots of great timing and movement.

GR: We knew going in that this arc was meant to be lighter in tone in many ways, that there was an inherent humor in the story and that the idea of people going to such extremes over coffee—even in Portland—bordered on the absurd. We needed to ground that, and take it seriously, to keep it plausible, but at the same time, Dex had to remain very much observer, so that the absurdity of the situation was never lost upon her. Going all academic on this—and there was a point in my life where I was pursuing scholarly work on the Private Eye genre—Dex is a liminal character at the best of times, it's in the nature of what the genre, what the fiction demands. That really serves in both a story and meta-textual level in this arc. And, yeah, I mean it's as Justin says—we wanted Dex to have the win, here.



JG: In terms of process, by the time I move on to finished pencils/inks I've done a lot of design work in the comp stage trying out different storytelling ideas. Once resolved, my layouts make for a good foundation to build on but when the time comes to commit to the finished work, I try hard to stay loose and leave room for improvising. I never exactly know how the finished version will look, but I was really happy with these.

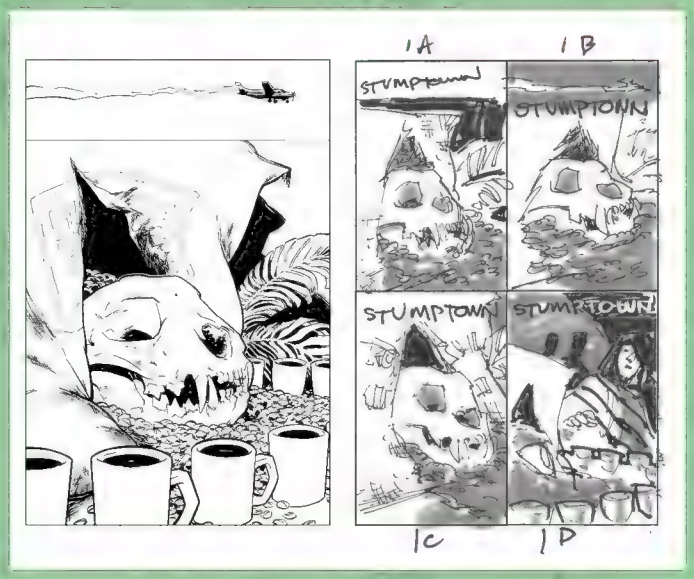
This is part of what I love about drawing. Ideas and storytelling have so much potential in their raw forms! The challenge is bringing that to life in a way that is truest to your own vision and serving the potential of each story. The times when you feel like you've succeeded are generally only related to how close you achieved that goal, at least from an artist standpoint. It's like you get a glimpse of what you could be in the best case scenario.



RH: Well in the previous answer when I said I tried to not make Portland seem constantly overcast...that's the exact look I had in mind for this sequence. It does rain here. Can't deny it. Knowing this arc was a tad more on the humor side (being about stolen coffee), I felt that pushing harder on the "detective story feel" aided the humor. These issues had a slightly darker and more limited palette than the first ones. I was trying to keep this sequence a bit grey without making it seem "dark." I attempted to keep most of this story how I had these few pages, hovering in the "just 5-6% more serious-looking than it should be" range.

WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR COVER DESIGN AND EXECUTION IN GENERAL, AND WHICH COVERS ARE YOUR FAVORITES FROM THIS SERIES?

GR: Honestly? It starts with Oni Editorial emailing to say we're going to need a cover, and then I try not to cry as I realize how far behind I am on everything, and then there's an exchange of emails—fairly short—where I lay out what's happening in the issue (if it hasn't been written as yet, and to be brutally frank, it almost never has been written yet), so that's really the first time I'm sharing what will happen in any particular issue (as opposed to any conversations we've have about the arc in its entirety).



The fact of the matter is that a lot of the time with Dex, I start with the idea of the story, and beats of the story, but the story itself remains very loose until it's written. I don't work that way on every book I do, but—now that I think about it—it makes sense for *Stumptown*, because it really is an extension of who Dex is as a character. She doesn't know what she's doing half the time, either. That sounds glib, but I think there's some merit in that.

So I'll toss out a couple of ideas based on what I think—think!—will happen in the issue, or based on what I (more infrequently) know what will happen in the issue, and then I get the hell out of the way as Justin gets to work. And in alarmingly little time, there start arriving emails with Justin's sketches and designs and ideas, and we go around on them, everyone weighing in, and—this is remarkable, I think, and it speaks to Justin's skill—there's never multiple rounds. I mean, Justin will send, four or five or six concepts, and always—always—one of them is just perfect. And we go from there.

JG: Sometimes Greg will come to me with a specific idea and we'll look at different versions around it. Other times I'll just riff on elements of that issue that I think are cool and see if we can't find a compelling image around it.

I remember feeling really happy with the covers to the issues collected in this volume. My favorite might be issue #10, that one of Dex in her car on stakeout. We were still nailing down what this issue would be about when I started on the cover, so I was winging it on the subject matter but felt like this would at least get us in the ballpark (and luckily ended up being a perfect fit once this actual script came in).

I really liked the close up one of Dove on issue #8 too, although I remember debating with the team a bit whether it was a good cover for *Stumptown* specifically. It definitely felt the least like the rest in the series, but it's hard to say whether that made it a problem either.

RH: For covers I tend to get the line art from Justin and just have to go, sometimes even before I have full story context since covers need to be done so early for solicitation. But Justin is a great illustrator and I can always just look at the image and I know exactly what I have to do. Issue #10 is my favorite. That one just popped for me, I really love it. It works on a story level, series level, and character level all the the same time. A lot of what *Stumptown* is is right in that one image to me.

STUMPTOWN INTERVIEW

WHAT WAS APPEAL OF A COFFEE-CENTERED STORYLINE?

GR: Coffee is so important to Portland. You don't...I mean, you may think you get it, but until you live here and experience the culture, you really have no idea how coffee has embedded itself in the city, into its identity. It's the social fulcrum of Portland. It's how things get done. It's as important to us as our beer and the Timbers and VooDoo Doughnuts and Powell's and the list goes on and on. And when you think about that, really think about it—when you go to a place like Water Avenue Coffee and you're watching three of the hippest hipsters you've ever seen, in the open workspace, ignoring all the clientele around them and having a very serious tasting—cupping—and one of them has to hold the end of his beard over his shoulder...how can you pass that up as a concept, if nothing else?

So that was part of it, definitely, and there was another element. The man who founded Stash Tea, and then went on to found Tazo, was a gentleman by the name of Steven Smith, who then went on to found Steven Smith Teamaker. He was local to Portland, and sadly died last year. I read a couple of obituaries about him, and was fascinated and moved. This is guy who made not one, but two separate tea businesses, sold both—one to Starbucks—had more money than anyone needed, used that money to do good in the world, and never lost his passion for tea. There are stories about his tasting skill, his ability to identify leaves and blends. And he was, by all accounts, socially responsible, socially active.

And I happen to like the teas he made, too.

So the two ideas—coffee and the late Steven Smith—combined, and that's how I got to the story. Justin sort of describes Weekes as snobbish, and I don't see that; Weekes is a zealot, and his religion is coffee. But he's not looking to convert you by the sword; he wants to invite you in, to share his passion. He wants you to love coffee as much as he loves coffee.

And that is SO Portland.

JG: Yeah, maybe snobbish is a little strong. But I think anybody who really is at that level of passionate on a topic can come off that way because there is a sense of elitism in that kind of extreme appreciation. Get me talking about playing poker as an example, you'll probably get hit with the same impression. Or comics, for that matter.

I remember most of the *Stumptown* team was at a dinner during Rose City Comic Con when we started talking about what we wanted to do with this volume. As soon as Greg mentioned the idea of Dex guarding some rich snob's specially cultivated coffee beans, I instantly started smiling. It's just so absurd and yet strangely believable.

We had some fun with the characters, too. We played a lot with different looks for Dove, from hulking monster in a clean white suit to the dapper, tall, slender version we settled on. And the same is true for our millionaire coffee lovers. Weekes was a quick easy fit, but we did a couple iterations of Laidlaw once Greg told me their names were an homage to a couple pals of his.

GR: Yeah, Weekes and Laidlaw are each named—and very very very loosely designed—off of Patrick Weekes and Mike Laidlaw, who work at BioWare in Edmonton. I've had the pleasure of getting to know each of them over the last couple years—Patrick is a terrifically talented writer, and Mike is a similarly brilliant creative director, most recently responsible for the *Dragon Age* franchise. They're just wonderful people, and they're great friends, and I just thought it'd be fun to put them in the book. Neither of them is an eccentric multi-billionaire, but, you know, should they end up in the billionaire category, I wouldn't put it past either of them...

RH: Coffee is to Portland what In-N-Out is to Los Angeles (those are the two places I've lived the majority of my life so it's the only comparison I have to draw). But for me that kind of says it. *Stumptown* as a series is a obviously very defined by its location and if you're gonna tell a story about a city, you have to eventually talk about its soul. With hopefully not reading as too pretentious, I think I can write confidently that coffee is very much apart of Portland's soul.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE SPOT FOR COFFEE IN PORTLAND?

GR: I should probably say something like, oh, the Stumptown on Belmont, or Water Avenue, but the fact is, my favorite spot is the Peets on NE Broadway at 15th, simply because I've been going there for almost 20 years now, and it's where I have a weekly meeting with some friends to catch up and shoot the shit and things like that. So that's my favorite spot, but it is not—by any stretch of the imagination—my favorite coffee. That goes to Heart, which is pretty damn hipster, I have to admit, but they've got a place on East Burnside, not too far from where my daughter goes to school, and the coffee is outstanding, and the space is almost welcoming.

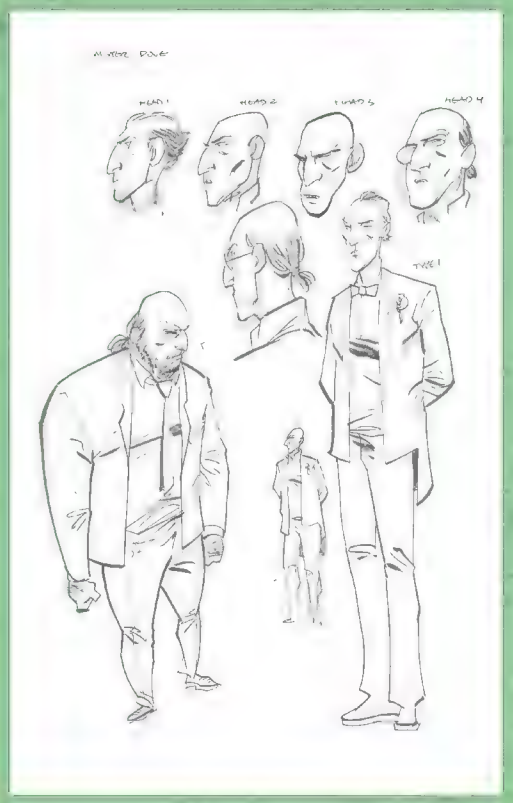
JG: I am like a blind man in the dark in Portland so I'll desperately drink the first coffee I run into out there. As much as I like a good cup of coffee, I think caffeine is actually my one true god.

RH: Stumptown Coffee Roasters near 45th and Division. I love that place. I sometimes house-sit for some friends who live REALLY close to it and I always look forward to that just because it cuts my wake-up-to-Stumptown-coffee time to under 5 minutes.

CHAPTER FIVE, "THE CASE OF THE NIGHT THAT WOULDN'T END," IS A MOSTLY SILENT ISSUE, AND STANDS APART FROM "THE CASE OF A CUP OF JOE." CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE INSPIRATION FOR THIS ISSUE, AND HOW WORKING ON IT DIFFERED FROM THE OTHER ISSUES?

JG: This has been something we talked about for a while, but it's hard to remember how it got rolling. I think Greg and I were talking on the phone and he suggested the idea of this being a single issue, done-in-one case. I really liked that idea and with "The Case of a Cup of Joe" being more humorous, it seemed like a great way to have a completely different beat to shift gears before heading into a much darker, more gritty volume five.

GR: My memory is actually the opposite, that it was your idea! That you were the one who proposed doing a done-in-one, something mostly quiet, and I went away with that and had a talk with James Lucas Jones, our esteemed Editor-For-Life, and we teased it out a bit, and then I went away and began working on it. It's not the kind of issue you just throw at your collaborator without giving them a head's up, you know? The issue lives or dies on Justin's storytelling. If that's not there, then the story just isn't going to work.



JG: That's interesting, I wonder if you're right! I have two kids under the age of 5 so my ability to retain specifics of a conversation is constantly coming into question. I definitely remember that we both really wanted to have this issue feel like something different. Greg asked me what I felt like drawing, and I thought it might be cool to do a more traditional PI story for this format. I don't remember whose idea it was for it to be mostly silent, but I really liked the idea of it being a nighttime stakeout. Being alone in a car with Dex gave us a chance to experience things as they happened. More intimate, in a way. And stylistically, it let me play with shadows and textures in a way that suited the story well.

A big concern for both of us was that the issue not feel disposable. I've often seen single issue stories end up being filler in a longer run, and it was important to us that it feel relevant, that we learn something about Dex in this case. Not that I knew how to achieve that beyond the basic idea, of course. But Greg came back with this killer script that really brought so much depth to this story. He made a concept that could have been one-note instead fell very rich and honest. And I think Ryan's colors were at their best on this story with a great sense of mood. The combination of these things made it one of my favorite issues to date.

RH: I agree with Justin that this is my favorite issue. We actually had the chance to talk about it face-to-face before I started working on it at last years Emerald City Comic Con. When he was describing it to me as this barren motel parking lot lit up only by this ridiculous neon sign… I got very excited and a little bit nervous. Silent issues obviously need the art to do the majority of the work and I really wanted this thing to be drenched with atmosphere but also not be unclear. I got to try some new approaches and techniques on this one and I'm just really, really happy with the end result I completely second that it's some of our best work on the series.

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE MOST VITAL PART OF A *STUMPTOWN* STORY IS?

GR: Dex and her relationship with the city, this faux-almost-but-not-quite-Portland we've created. Everything is told within that context, specifically, and within the broader context of this faux-almost-but-not-quite-Oregon where our Portland is placed.

JG: The ending of "The Case of a Cup of Joe" felt to me like the best example of a true *Stumptown* story. It comes down to Dex, having solved her case after considerable trouble, walking into this last moment with her sister and it ending so bittersweet.

Or, you know that moment in Volume 2 where Dex is driving away in Isobel's car and and she looks like the cat that ate the canary until she reaches up and finds her head bleeding? That's such a true *Stumptown* moment right there.

RH: Dex screwing up. *Stumptown* is a chronicle of Dex screwing up. And then going on in spite of it. I mean, sometimes it seems she's on these cases as some form of weird "this-is-how-I-work-it-all-out." But I really love that.

WHO IS YOUR FAVORITE CHARACTER?

GR: Sentimental favorite, absolutely Ansel, just because he's so very pure. But Dex, of course. It has to be Dex. This is her book, these are her stories, and I love her, all of her warts and stubbornness and self-awareness and lack thereof and her willingness to fight and bleed over a hill that no one else wants. Always Dex.

JG: Outside of Dex, my favorite might be Ansel. His scenes always evoke a strong feeling, whether it be humor or pulling on heartstrings. His dynamic with Dex is fantastic, and maybe the only time you are going to see a completely unguarded Dex. He's like a mirror, giving a peek of who she is behind her everyday armor.

Specific to this volume, I really enjoyed drawing Laidlaw.

RH: Dex. For all the reasons the guys already mentioned. Again, not to read like Hallmark-card-sentiment but I think there is as much of Portland in Dex as Dex in Portland. I think on a certain level she's a great metaphor for the city itself after watching it change-grow-fail-succeed-grow in the last 5-6 years especially. Maybe that's too corny but I like seeing it that way.

WHAT ARE YOUR INFLUENCES, AND WHAT GOT YOU INTO CRIME FICTION?

JG: Hands down, my interest in crime stories really started with my father. He was born in Oakland in 1941, so that put him directly into the heart of a really interesting time here in the Bay at just the right age for it. So the stories I grew up on were most often about street racing, jail, drugs, motorcycles and outlaws. The police were never the good guys and instead were most likely to be considered either an inconvenience or the flat-out villains.

Things had mostly settled down in my father's life by the time we came along, but it was the culture and conversation we grew up with. Morality. Loyalty. Justice. My favorite entertainment to this day still follows similar threads, and nearly all crime tales touch on one or all of it.

As a result, I became much less interested in what people did and way more interested in why. It's the true heart of a good story, and the one place you can find truth. Intention doesn't necessarily justify actions, but they can be so incredibly compelling that you can't look away. And I think maybe that is most clearly seen in crime stories, where intentions and actions are often at odds.

This alone makes it easy to see why I enjoyed *Stumptown* so much, even before I was involved in working on it. Part of what makes it challenging to draw it is conveying how Dex feels despite what she's saying or what she's involved with.

GR: Oh boy. See, this isn't a short-answer question. This is a dissertation level-answer question, and I don't want to write a dissertation, and I pretty much suspect nobody wants to read it.

Influences? They're all over the genre. I watched *The Rockford Files* religiously as a kid, *Magnum P.I.* and *Simon & Simon*, too. So I was primed by pop-culture, so to speak.

The first definitive "PI novel" I remember reading was *Murder on the Yellow Brick Road*, by the late Mystery Writers of America Grandmaster Stuart Kaminsky. My mother picked it up for me at a bookstore when she was out of town; she'd gone into a mystery bookstore and asked the bookseller to

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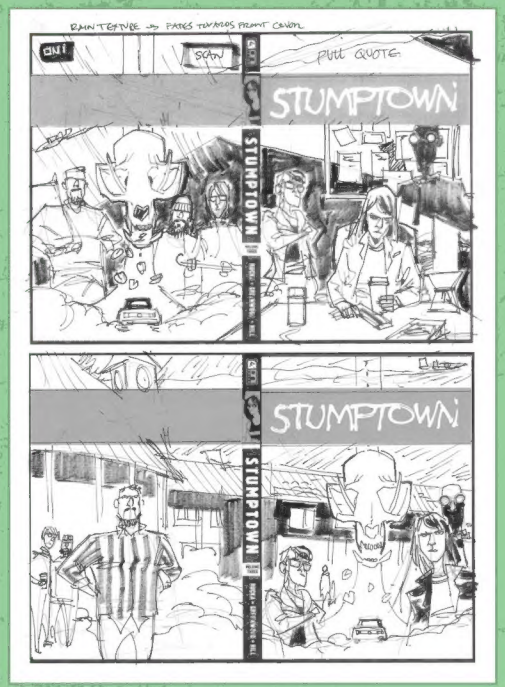


recommend something for her ten-year-old son. Either this bookseller was an asshole or ignorant, because he put this book in her hands—and I mean, you look at the cover, you read the title, you think, okay, this is going to be mirthful, maybe set in Oz or something like that.

Yeah, no. It's set in period LA, and it's told first-person from the point of view of a PI named Tobias "Toby" Peters. There's a lot to recommend the series, and there's a lot of wonderful stuff to unpack in the series, but I won't get into it her—what I'll say is that my mom handed 10-year-old me this book that begins with the sentence, "Someone had murdered a munchkin" and was about porn films being made on the disused (but still standing) sets of the Wizard of Oz, in particular someone pretending to be Dorothy. So Toby is hired by Judy Garland to find out who's doing this and maybe, please, put a stop to it.

The book was funny, and naughty, and a little sexy (especially when you're 10 and Toby has sex in a dentist's chair with the femme fatale), and—amidst all of this—devastatingly powerful, just filled with sincere humanity and emotion. I finished it and went to the library and, to my delight, discovered that there were something like five or six other books in the series. I read them all, and they were amazing—right place, right time.

I came up through the standard channels, so to speak—*Hardy Boys* and *Nancy Drew* and *Encyclopedia Brown* and then to *Sherlock Holmes*. I'd hated the *Hardy Boys*. I liked *Nancy Drew*. I loved *Sherlock Holmes*. Loving *Sherlock Holmes* lead to reading the pastiches that were then coming out—Nick Meyer's *The Seven Percent Solution*, and, more importantly, two books by Loren D. Estleman, *Sherlock Holmes vs. Dracula* and *Doctor Jekyll and Mister Holmes*, and yes, I know how those titles sound, but they were each terrific.

And it turned out this Estleman guy, he wrote other books, too. In particular a series about a PI named Amos Walker.

Then Robert B. Parker enters the picture with Spenser, because about this time Spenser for Hire gets on the air, and his books are everywhere. So I'm reading those too, as fast as I can get my grubby little mits on them.

Which is when it sort of sinks in that there's a continuity, here—that what starts with Holmes arrives with (at that moment in time, for me) Spenser, and that all of these authors, all of these characters, while sharing fundamental truths, they're exploring similar, and disparate, themes. And when I say it "sinks in" I mean to say, I realized something was up, but couldn't really articulate what that was.

So by the time I get to college, I'm pretty deep in the genre. I've gone back and discovered Hammett and Chandler and Macdonald, and in the midst of all this, the genre is having a remarkable renaissance. I discover Lawrence Block, and his Matt Scudder series (which still contains for me not just one or two but three of the best novels ever published in the genre), and Sara Paretsky has kicked in the door with V.I. Warshawski, and Sue Grafton is about to come on the scene with *A is for Alibi*, and somewhere in this, I've determined that this is the genre I want to work in, and somewhere in all of this, I've taken the time to really approach the genre from an academic perspective. I mean, my senior thesis in college was going to be "The American Private Investigator as a Means of Social Commentary: From Chandler to Parker."

I was serious business about this.

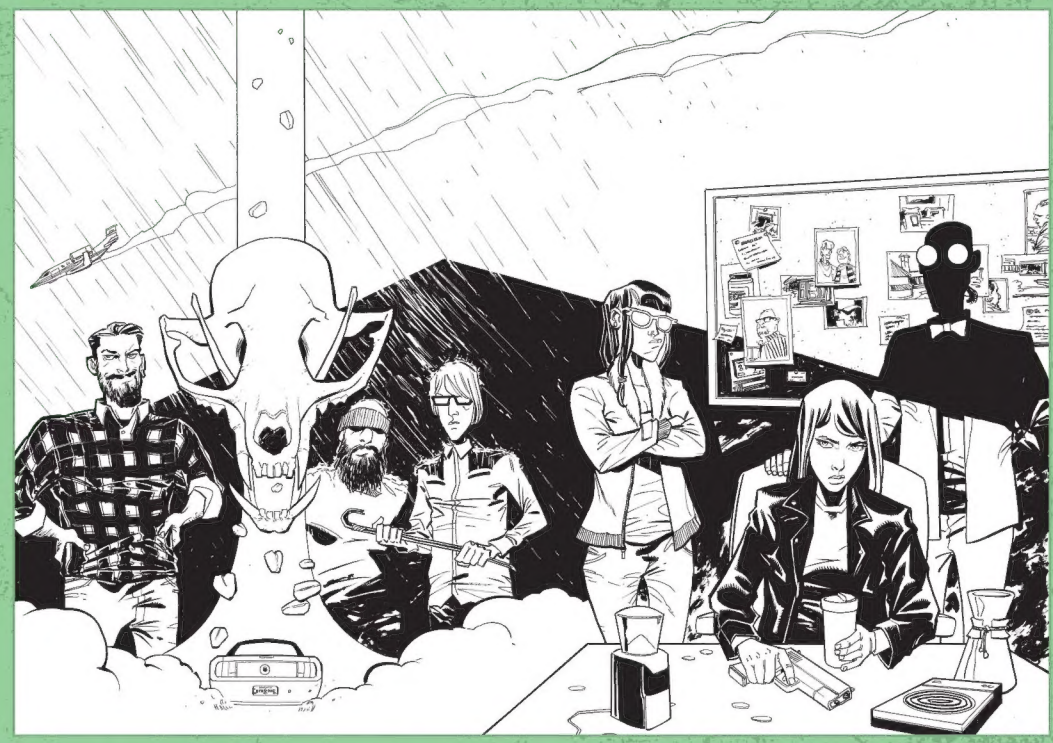
Now, if you're still with me, things start moving fast. My thesis turns out not to be academic but creative, I spend the year doing some serious writing, and I go off to grad school, and my master's thesis is my attempt to write a PI novel. But my character's not a PI—he's a personal protection specialist, a bodyguard. Meant to be a cosmetic change—a lot of the genre has, as its protagonists, a detective who is not "officially" a licensed PI, after all—but turns out, that difference was fundamental to the kind of story I was going to tell. So instead of becoming a "mystery writer," I became a "suspense-thriller" writer.

Dex is actually the second PI I've created who can point back at the long line of detectives who came before her and claim direct lineage. The first was Bridgett Logan, who appears in the *Kodiak* series, the series about the aforementioned bodyguard, and she was in the damn series because I wanted to finally get to write a PI, and my main protagonist didn't fit the role. But in the *Kodiak* series, that's a series primarily about Atticus, and any attempts to play in the genre are mitigated by that. Bridgett is a fine PI, and I adore writing her, but she's not the lead.

It took me the better part of twenty, twenty-five years before I finally was able to write the character that made me want to be a writer in the first place.

DEX PARIOS.

So there you go.



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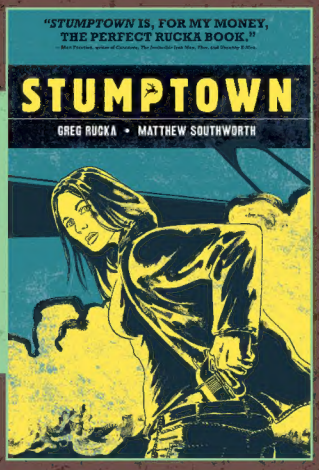

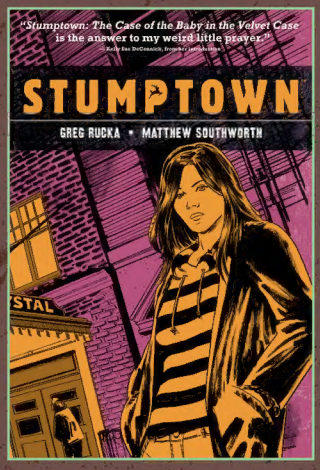
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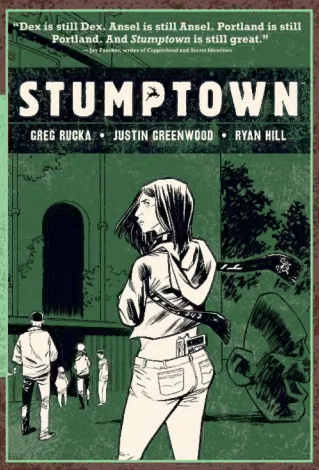
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